

## 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost, Year C

16 October 2022

Over the past few weeks of serving in my Diocesan position, I have been part of conversations about issues that youth are passionate about. While discussing these, things like the climate crisis and racial justice issues, I have been reminded of a constant frustration that I had as a teenager in the church: being made aware of a problem, feeling moved to help in some way, but not knowing and receiving no direction on how to affect change. For instance, I remember vividly a speaker coming to my youth group to tell us about human trafficking. My friends and I felt so compelled to act, sacrificially if necessary, so we approached the speaker after the presentation to ask, “what do we do?”, and “how do we help?” The response was so disheartening: “just knowing about the issue is a good first step.” No second steps offered.

Maybe you can recall experiences like this from your youth. I’d bet that you still have them today. I know that I do. Perhaps as adults we have had more practise at managing those feelings of zeal for an issue. In the face of crisis or injustice you are moved to act, but the problem just seems too big to fathom the possibility of our being able to affect change. We look at what is happening to our climate, or to the people of Ukraine, or to children who are sold as property. What do we do?

This morning we have an answer: What do we do? We pray. As we contemplate Jesus’ teaching on prayer, I want to challenge you to think of prayer not as the leftover, like “I can’t do anything else, so I guess that I’ll pray”, but instead to think of prayer as the single most important thing that you can do in these and in all situations. Indeed, we are asked to pray always and to not loose heart.

It would be easy to take this teaching of Jesus and use the persistent widow as a model of discipline in our own Christian practices, and to offer the charge: “just keep praying.” You and I *should* be faithful in our practice of prayer, but I don’t think that such a charge would truly apprehend what Jesus is trying to teach his followers in this passage. We are to pray, but the point of this teaching is not centred on our behaviour, or what we are to do. Much more than that: it is God revealing himself to us.

Let’s unpack the parable to see how: there is a judge who neither fears God nor has respect for people, and yet he has power. He can grant justice. There too is a widow, who has been accused, of what, we don’t know. Remember that widows were vulnerable people in this society with little agency and virtually no power of their own. This is why God implores his people time and time again to remember the widow and orphan. In a justice system that does not operate on the principle of ‘innocent until proven guilty’, we can infer that this accusation has put the widow in a terrible situation. She needs help.

Why does the widow persistently continue to come the judge asking for justice even after he refuses? The widow is persistent because she recognizes that the judge is the only one who can give her what she needs. Her belief in his power to execute justice motivates her behaviour.

**God reveals himself to us as the one who can, and will, meet our needs. Furthermore, he wants us to trust him to do so.**

Jesus says very certainly that God will grant justice to his chosen ones when they cry out to him. What is justice? Simply put, it is when each of us has what we need; that is, enough. Do we live as though God has the power to do this? Do our actions reflect our belief that God is able to deliver the things that we need; the things that we are powerless to affect on our own?

I think that you do. The prayer list is the proof. You ask week after week for God to intervene in the lives those whom you care about, who need help, because you know that he is able. Jesus says in Luke: "I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them."

You may wonder, why do we need to ask at all? God is good, so why doesn't he just fix things? God is all-powerful, so why doesn't he just heal the planet, erase prejudice, and set the captives free now? These are good questions. For the answer, we must look at this parable in the context of the whole of Scripture. God gave us the gift of free will. He loves us too much to take that away. As such, his action is woven through human history by the willing participation of his people. Take Moses for instance. As he leads God's people through the Red Sea, the Lord said to Moses, **"Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers..."** (Exodus 14:26; cf. Exodus 14:26-29). Later the texts of Deuteronomy and the Psalms speak of *God's* mighty hand and outstretched arm that delivered Israel out of Egypt. Moses raises his hand in willing participation and God delivers.

God works through Moses. He speaks through the prophets. Surely, he can deliver justice if we are willing to participate in his will be done.

Furthermore, God uses us to answer our prayers. Jesus' command to pray without ceasing is an invitation for God to form us in the process. Again, this is consistent with the testimony of the whole of Scripture. Take Boaz, for example, in the Book of Ruth. Having heard of Ruth's care of her mother-in-law Naomi following the death of all their male relatives, Boaz prays for Ruth, **"May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!"** God grants Ruth and Naomi justice through Boaz, the man who allows Ruth to glean in his fields, ensuring her protection as she does so. Furthermore, he ends up marrying her, so that both women are perpetually protected by the restoration of family.

So do be persistent in prayer. Direct all passion you feel for the important issues that confront us towards God. God wants you to trust him to be who he is, that is, everything that we need. God will shape us by our choice to participate in his will. He is not disheartened by that which we find difficult or even impossible. God is powerful to deliver justice.

“And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” Lord give us faith, and enable us to receive your justice. Amen.