**Introduction**

Persistence and faith…
It often seems that one builds up the other.
In our scripture passage today, Jesus tells the disciples a parable to encourage them to persist in prayer and not give up. Then he ends his story with a question – a profound question – and one still being answered today.

Turn with me to Luke 18:1-8…

**Scripture**

1. Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

2. He said: ‘In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. 3. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, “Grant me justice against my adversary.”

4. ‘For some time [the judge] refused. But finally he said to himself, “Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, 5. yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!”’

6. And the Lord said, ‘Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8. I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.

However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?’

**Sermon**

It’s kind of Luke to give us an explanation of the parable before we read it. That rarely happens with parables. Often they leave us with more questions than answers. But this time and with this parable the purpose is a bit more pointed. We are being told to pray – to pray always – to pray persistently – and to never give up.

The characters in this parable are stark and appear to be equally matched.

There is a judge… This judge sounds pretty horrible. I wouldn’t want to appear before him. He is about as unlike God as possible. He has no respect for God, and he doesn’t care a thing about people.

And then there is a widow – I love her!
Jesus says this widow kept on coming back to this judge again and again pleading for justice.
I don’t know where she got her gumption and courage but I want to be just like her, how about you?

Verse 4: “For some time the judge refused” – wonder how long “some time” was? It must have been a while – days? Weeks? Months? I have no idea – but that doesn’t seem to matter because our widow persisted. She kept on pleading, day after day after day. Until finally, the judge agreed to see that she received justice. I love this – notice the text in verse 5… “I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!”

Sounds like the judge had become a bit intimidated by the widow’s persistence in seek justice. Good for her!

Jesus goes on to contrast the unjust Judge with God who is Justice in person.

“The point of the parable is this: if even a rotten judge like that can be persuaded to do the right thing by someone who pesters him day and night until it happens, then of course God, who is Justice in person, and who cares passionately about people, will vindicate them and will see that justice is done.”¹

We can count on God to come down on the side of justice. We can count on God to hear the ones who have no power, no influence, and no voice. We can count on God to hear those who have nowhere else to turn. God may not always give us exactly what we ask for but we can count on God to hear, with loving, parental patience, the persistent prayers of [our] heart. ²

The early church, which first hearing this parable and later reading this text together, certainly prayed for many things it did not receive: safety and protection from persecution, for instance. Yet they did receive what was most needed: a sense of God’s loving presence and attentiveness, and the strength and resilience and fortitude they needed to survive.³

In a way, the example of the widow in Jesus’ parable represents not only the need to pray always but also the Holy Spirit’s never ending work of encouraging us to pray, the Spirit’s nagging persistence and unrelenting perseverance. This hopeful courage that we receive as a gift from the Holy Spirit leads us not only to a meditative and introspective life of prayer, but to an active and “extrospective” life of prayer as well, one that includes resistance against all forms of injustice.⁴

¹ N.T.Wright, Luke for Everyone, p.213
Finally the parable ends with a question that reaches beyond the cross and the tomb and the resurrection into the future: “However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” We may find the beginnings of an answer in Luke’s Gospel itself where a number of people are commended for their faith:

- the centurion who believes Jesus will heal his slave, even from a distance;
- the sinful woman who anoints Jesus’ feet and loves much;
- friends of the paralytic who are willing to dig through a roof;
- the bleeding, unclean woman who touches Jesus’ clothes in the crowd and is healed;
- the Samaritan leper, whose gratitude turns him back to Jesus where he falls at his feet in thanksgiving;
- and the blind beggar later in this chapter who sees Jesus for who he is and calls to him.

So a beginning of the answer to this profound question appears to be that the Son of Man will find faith, but it may be in unexpected places, as it has been in the Gospel – maybe not so much among the religious professionals or the ones who see so certain of their own righteousness, but rather among the outsiders, the unlovely, the unclean, the ones certain of their sinfulness, ones just like us.

It also seems this parable suggests that a sign of faith will be a willingness to persist in prayer, as we see in this widow who persists against all odds in her fight for justice against the powerful judge.

Another sign may be in what we pray for: daily bread, the Holy Spirit, the kingdom, justice – or something altogether different.⁵

So keep praying my friends… and never give up.

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