

# Sermon for the Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

*“He told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 8:).*

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Got  
that? Always pray... but what does this mean?

Well,  
as you know, parables can be tricky because there are so many nuances, so many angles—

so many ways to get them WRONG!

Case in  
point: Today we hear the tale of a woman who relentlessly pesters the judge until she gets what she wants. Punchline?

Pray hard enough, pray often enough -

be like this woman  
and “Take it to the Lord in prayer,” and you, too, will get what you want...  
right?

Wrong!

In fact, even the historical account of Jacob wrestling with God until he finally gets what he wants could be misunderstood as a lesson in perseverance:

Be like Jacob, keep up the struggle, and you, too, will  
prevail.

But  
guess what? The Scriptures are not about you and what you must do to receive

God's blessings.

They are about what  
your gracious, ever-loving God is continually doing for you!

Which means today,  
like every Lord's Day, is about what God is doing for you in Christ by His Holy Spirit.

Today,  
all three persons of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are  
working toward one purpose, and that is to save you, to love you,  
  
and to gather you  
back into that everlasting communion with Them for which you were created.

So  
before we get lost in some dead-end alley trying to track down the meaning of  
today's parable,

let's make sure we  
start off on the right track - that we're focusing on the right thing -

that we are, in  
fact, seeking Christ in the Scriptures, and not our own works, merits, or  
strengths.

For as  
Jesus has makes clear, the Scriptures really do testify about HIM.

They really are about  
God in Christ coming for you with His vindication and deliverance-

God "doing the  
verbs" - God "doing the doing" when it comes to your blessing, justice, and  
salvation.

And  
really, that should not surprise us, right? I mean,

God always goes first.

Creation  
itself begins with God.

And not  
only does He create and sustain all things from nothing,  
but even after our  
fall into sin, HE reveals HIS salvation by giving us HIS promise of a Savior.

It is  
God who clothes those first sinners in bloody garments to cover their shame and  
nakedness.

It is God who remains  
faithful to His promise, revealing His faithfulness in many and various ways,  
coming to His people  
again and again with His Word, His rescue, His promise that in the end,

He will restore *all*  
of us to that Paradise lost.

In  
fact, most of the OT is the history of God taking the initiative - "God going  
first" -

God coming to His  
people by grace, calling them out of the darkness of slavery and avenging them  
-

destroying  
their enemies and giving them the victory,

gathering  
them into His glorious, saving presence,

and ultimately  
delivering them to the Land of Promise where He would be their God and they  
would be His treasured people.

All of

this, of course, is a picture that points to God's promise of a Savior for ALL people in ALL times and ALL places -

a Savior fulfilled in

Christ - a Savior who rescues *us* out of the darkness of sin and death and gathers *us* into His presence to commune with Him.

He locates Himself

among US in His Glory and guides us every step of the way until we, too, arrive at the Land of Promise -

the heavenly realm

where Christ, who has vindicated us and avenged us on the cross will shepherd us and remain God with us at the feast that never ends.

And I

guess the question is, what shall we render to the Lord for all His benefits to us?

What is it that God wants from us?

The

answer is clear: He wants you to follow Him in the way that leads to eternal life.

He wants you to turn

from your sin and death to receive the new life He purchased for you on the cross.

And as

you make your pilgrimage through this fallen and dying wasteland where the devil tempts and taunts and tortures you every step of the way,

He says, "not to lose heart" (Luke 18:1), but always pray -

always "Call on the

Name of the Lord," which is another way of saying, "Come to Me, all who labor - take your place in worship,"

take your place in

the assembly, in the courts of the Lord's house where you take the Cup of Salvation and receive the vindication and justice He has promised. (Psa 51:10-12)

"Pray  
always, and do not lose heart..."

Jesus  
is telling a parable of grace and deliverance, not law and works - which is exactly the lesson we need to hear over and over.

For we cannot save ourselves -

we have no  
righteousness, no merit, no *nothing* - not even OUR faith, OUR devotion,  
OUR efforts at prayer by which we can save ourselves.

And  
once you've moved past the delusion of your own omnipotence -

once you've experienced your own helplessness in the face of  
pain -

once you've  
discovered your utter inability to escape loss, injustice, and even the  
certainty of your own death,

then  
you know what kind of trouble you are in.

And  
whether it is your inability to find peace in your own marriage or family -

your inability to get over the pain and weakness of your own  
failing body -

the inability to  
change this crazy world and the incredible injustice that surrounds you,

it  
is easy to lose heart...

So what  
can you do? Nothing!

There is nothing you can do to change this!

Like  
the cheated, bankrupted widow of the parable, you are utterly powerless.

Like Jacob running from his angry, vengeful brother, you're a  
sitting duck.

There  
is NOTHING you can do.

And  
this is where the wheels can so easily come off and everything go off the rails  
when it comes to understanding today's parable.

For it is tempting to  
conclude that if we pray hard enough and wrestle with God, then we can get Him  
to do what needs to be done, right?

No... For  
that is not what prayer is about.

Prayer is nothing but faith receiving what God has promised.

Prayer is the open  
hand, the open ear, even the open mouth into which God pours His gifts.

Prayer is what faith  
fearing, loving, and trusting in God for His promise in every circumstance of  
our life looks like.

And so,  
these stories about fearful Jacob and the hard-pressed woman wrestling and  
pestering God are *not* examples of what YOU must do to be saved.

Rather, they reveal  
the love of God who comes *for* you in your fear and helplessness and  
pours out HIS blessing, HIS justice, HIS victory *for* you.

The  
wrestling, the pleading, which is to say, the “praying” that we find taking  
place here is nothing other than “Faith taking hold of the Promise.”

In fact, if you’ll  
notice, *God comes to Jacob*, right?

Jacob  
merely grasps hold of God and demands His blessing, holding God to His Promise  
of a Savior who would come from His line –

His Promise of a nation that would come forth from his  
lineage –

His Promise of a  
land and a kingdom that would be a blessing for ALL nations – things that God  
had promised that could never happen if Jacob was wiped out.

Likewise,  
in our parable of the destitute widow, even the “unrighteous judge” was present  
to be called upon, right?

He had located himself in a place he could be found.

He was there at a  
specified time so the widow could plead her cause and receive what she was  
unable to obtain for herself.

She  
knew exactly when to call, where to call, and who to call,  
  
because she knew that’s  
what the judge had been sworn to provide.

The judge was there  
to uphold justice, and she simply insisted he fulfill his oath, his promise.

So I  
guess the question is, where can YOU turn in every time of trouble?

From where does YOUR help come?

The  
answer is given in today's Psalm: "Your help comes from the LORD who made  
heaven and earth;

the LORD who keeps you from all evil;

the LORD who neither  
slumbers nor sleeps..." and who has *promised* His justice and salvation for  
you.

When  
the terrors come and you suffer the accusations of the devil and the terrors of  
this fallen world and the failures of your dying flesh,

call on Him who has  
come for you here again today - right here, right now - and every Lord's Day.

For  
here, at this altar, God pours out His justice for you -

not reluctantly, not  
by being worn down by your prayers, not even by your wrestling,

but  
by His grace and mercy.

For He  
is no "unjust judge" like the lout in our parable, but is in fact far greater.

He is your faithful  
and loving Judge who gives His justice speedily - now - It is finished!

And  
when you come and throw yourself before Him like that helpless woman;  
  
when you grasp hold  
of Him in His Body and Blood and demand He keep His promise as Jacob did,  
  
then  
you may be assured of His blessing:



Your sins ARE  
forgiven. You ARE justified. Your enemy IS vanquished.

Go in peace – in the Name of Jesus

*Preached by Pastor Holowach*

*Sermon Texts: Gen 32:22-30; Luke 8:1-8*