

## Persistent in Prayer.

Text: Jeremiah 31:27-34

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5 (Series C, 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost) Ps. 119:97-104

Luke 18:1-8

***Jesus told his disciples a parable to teach them that they should  
always pray and never become discouraged.***

Prayer:

(Dialogue: What is a prayer .... In your own words? A Conversation!)

A magazine cartoon portrays a little fellow kneeling beside his bed for his bedtime prayer and saying with some measure of disgust, "Dear God, Uncle Jim still doesn't have a job; my sister still doesn't have a date for the social; Grandma is still feeling sick - and I'm tired of praying for this family and not getting results."

Praying was a problem for this little fellow and he isn't alone. Prayer is a problem for many modern people even Christians including me. If it wasn't a problem, then why are there so few people who take prayer seriously?

If it isn't a problem for us then why do we find it so hard to set time aside everyday to spend with God in conversation (prayer)? If we took prayer seriously then we wouldn't hesitate to be *persistent* and *consistent* in the time we spend in conversation with God.

If we think that this is a particularly modern problem, think again. Why would Jesus have told this parable to his disciples? Why would he have given us the Lord's Prayer as a model prayer, if everybody back then believed in prayer or knew how to pray?

In fact, throughout the gospel of Luke and Acts there is great deal of talk about prayer or conversation with God. All of this suggests that prayer is not simply today's problem - it is a problem for anyone who believes in God or want to walk with God.

If we really believe in the power of prayer, if we really believe that prayer can effect, world peace, if we are truly convinced that prayer changes things, changes us, heals broken lives and restores broken relationships, then we would be praying constantly.

And that is what Jesus addresses here. We simply lose heart, when our prayers are not answered "*rightly*". Maybe there was a time when we thought prayer was effective. But we have been disappointed and lose heart. So, Jesus tells a parable about *persistent prayer*.

There were judges in Jesus' day who were notorious for accepting bribes, and perverting the course of justice. The story goes on to tell us about a widow who has a case, and comes to see the judge, but she has nothing to offer as a bribe.

Neither does she have anyone to speak on her behalf. She is a picture of *helplessness* person. But she does have one thing. The gift of being a pest. Leaving messages on the judge's answering machine, she was on face book, Instagram, constantly appearing in his office, writing email after email, sending faxes, voice mail etc. She gives him no peace - she is persistent. She wanted justice and she wanted it now!

Finally, this judge says to himself, "Even though I don't care much about God and I can't stand this woman, I will give this woman what she wants just to get her out of my hair.

We are God's people. And persistence is the order of the day. Jesus tells us the purpose of this parable in his opening sentence. He wanted his disciples to "*always pray and not to give up*". We should persist and not lose heart. This the key phase in the whole parable. "*Always pray and not to give up*".

There are two points that come out of this parable for me. Firstly, the widow was in a *helpless situation* she could have easily lost heart and given up. As someone who was a nobody in her community, and she lacked influential friends, the chance of her having any success was nil. She is a picture of *helplessness* and who wouldn't blame her for losing heart.

We don't pray because we lose heart. If we really believed that God hears and answers our prayers, if we were convinced that prayer actually changes things, heals broken lives, and restores broken relationships.

Then, like the woman, we would be hammering on God's door constantly, *asking, seeking and knocking*, and *waiting*, our trust sometimes fainting, sometimes growing angry. In the face of every difficulty we would not lose heart, but *consistently* and *persistently* keep on going to God even though we have become discouraged.

If we really believe that God answers prayers, then we, like Jesus, will not give up because the situation seems too hopeless or we are too worn out by the circumstances to take it to God in prayer. That is just what Jesus is getting at. "*Keep on praying*", he says.

Faith is the furnace of our lives. Its fuel is the grace of God. And the divinely appointed shovel for feeding the burner is *prayer*. If you lose heart and lay down the shovel, the fire will go out, we will grow cold and hard.

It would have been easy for that widow to give up because the odds were against her ever moving the corrupt judge to do anything in her favour. In spite of how things might look to you and I, and how overpowering the trouble is in our life, and even though the situation appears hopeless, Jesus urges us not to lose faith but to "*keep on praying.*"

Firstly, that if we believe that prayer is important nothing should keep us from praying. The second point is that this parable is about the Character of God. The Character of God which means God can be trusted.

If that sleazy and corrupt judge who had no real interest in the widow at his door, will open his hand and answer the requests of the widow, then how much more will your heavenly Father, my heavenly Father listen to our conversation.

I believe that God has a deep and intimate concern with everything that happens in our lives, and has promised to answer our conversations and petitions with love in his time.

This parable is about the *trustworthiness* and *generosity* of God. If a crooked judge can give what is asked for, how much more will God who is gracious and kind supply our needs.

Jesus said, *"Which of you, if his son asks for bread will give you him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though, you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give good gifts to those who asks him"* (Matthew 7:10,11).

You see, if parents like us give good things to our children because we love them, so is our Father who promised to love us as his own at our baptism and makes us members of his family, will never ignore our prayers, and will always answer them in the most loving way.

Our text today reassures us that God does hear our prayers, and we can take comfort in the knowledge that God is far more gracious than the dishonest judge. He answers out of his goodness and kindness and grace.

If God's answers depended on us, on how well we pray, the word we chose, the loudness of our prayers, or on how well we have lived as God's people, then we could never expect to have our prayers answered or engagement in conversation with God.

I'm sure every one of us here this morning will admit that prayer doesn't have the place in our lives as it should. Even as we confess our slackness when it comes to praying, God answers that prayer out of love and reminds us that we belong to him and the blood of his Son has saved us.

His answers are always the best. It may be not what we want, and his answers are never vengeful or vindictive. As God's children you and I can count on God's faithfulness.

Keep on praying because he is gracious and kind. Keep on praying even if the whole situation looks hopeless in our eyes. Keep on praying because he loves us and is waiting to answer our prayers in a way that will be for our benefit.

What I have learned from this text is that: When we pray, we must be *persistent* and *humble*. Most of all, we cannot depend on our own resources always to get us through problems. We need to trust God and his strength.

Sometimes we may doubt, we may be angry, we may be upset, we may question "why me?" but God is always ready to engage us in conversation, when we ask, when we seek, and when we knock.

Now in closing remember, the word of Jesus to us this morning is that we ought *always to pray and not lose heart*. The subject of prayer should always be interesting to Christians. Prayer is the very life-breath of true Christianity.

It is in prayer, that true religion begins. It is in prayer, that true religion flourishes. Prayer is one of the first evidences of conversion. (Acts 9:11.) Neglect of prayer, is the sure road to a fall. (Matthew 26:40, 41.) Whatever throws light on the subject of prayer, is for our spiritual health.

Jesus leaves us with that final disturbing question: *And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?* How do we answer? By returning again, and again, and again *to Scripture, to prayer, to patience, to giving and receiving* support in a community of faith and discipleship, to carry out our ministries fully. Above all, we have a plain mark described by our Lord, in the passage before us. God's elect are a people who *"cry unto God night and day."* They are essentially a praying people.

Let us be bothered enough *to listen, remember,* and turn back to the Gospel Truth, each time we turn only to ourselves as judge. Let us be a bother in *patience, persistence, inspiration,* to all we meet. Let our faith bloom amidst the rocks and obstacles of this human journey. Always pray and do not lose heart. What is Prayer? A Conversation with God. **Amen.**