

20 October 2019  
Pentecost 19

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Widow’s Faith, Widow’s Prayer”

Text: Luke 18:1-8; 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5; Genesis 32:22-30

*Tough week. Weary. Lots of ideas for preaching, but none would come out on paper! So a gentle reworking of a sermon from yesteryear . . .*

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

***And Jesus told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.***

It’s easy to lose heart, isn’t it? Jesus knows that. He is a man in every way like us except without sin. So He knows what it’s like when bad news comes, when your life is rocked, when you have disappointment upon disappointment, when there’s no end in sight, when the future looks bleak and uncertain. When you’re weary. It is at such times that it’s easy to lose heart - to lose confidence, to lose courage, to lose hope, to resign yourself to the thought that this is just the way things are and they aren’t going to get any better. And it can happen even toward God, can’t it? We worry, we doubt, we wonder what God is doing or why it’s taking Him so long . . . if He sees and knows and cares about me.

Not always, of course. There are good times in our lives as well. Times of success, times of triumph. Days when the sun is shining, friendships and health are good, there is laughter and good times.

But this parable of Jesus is not just for those times *when* we lose heart - it is so that we *may not* lose heart. It is so that in both the good times and the bad times, we live by faith in God. In a God who loves to give, to care, and have mercy. Even when that giving, care, and mercy are not evident or obvious. So that faith be the bedrock of our lives, and nothing else.

Like the widow in the parable. She is a nameless nobody, and what little she had seems to have been ripped off by her adversary. So she goes to the judge and issues her petition for judgment, for justice. And she won’t give up. She does not despair, she does not lose heart, for faith is alive in her. **She won’t not be given to.** She wrestles with the judge. She pounds on his door and his ears until she receives what she has come for. She will not let go. Faith does not let go.

That’s the parable. It’s pretty simple. But here’s the question Jesus asks: ***when the Son of***

***Man comes, will he find such faith - faith like this widow's - on earth?***

Good question. Jesus is that Son of Man, but Jesus is not referring to that current time - but to when He will come again, in the end, in the final judgment. When He does, this is what He will be looking for. Faith. Faith that looks to Him, relies on Him, and cries out to Him. Faith that clings to the Word and promises of God, not our own opinions of who God is and what He ought to be doing.

So ***if the Son of Man came today*** (which He well might!), ***would He find such faith on earth?*** Well, yes and no we would say, I suppose. It's a mixed bag. There are plenty of folks, as Paul wrote to Timothy, who have ***itching ears*** . . . faithless ears, who do not want to hear what God has to say, ***but who accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths***. But there are plenty of widows, too, I would say. Maybe you just cannot see them. Maybe they look like they have it all together. But maybe every night, that friend or neighbor or co-worker of yours is down on their knees, crying out to God like this widow.

But the question - ***if the Son of Man came today, would He find such faith on earth?*** - is better directed not at others, but at ourselves. ***How is it with you?*** Faith or unfaith? Gratitude or thanklessness? Content or discontent? Obedience or attitude? Listening or ordering? Humility or pride? What you think of God, what you believe about Him, is reflected in these things. The widow in the parable would not give up because she knew this worldly judge would do right in the end. Even if her belief was against the odds or what anyone else thought. How much more the children of a heavenly Father who has promised good.

And not just promised, but ***fulfilled*** that promise.

The judge in the parable did not want to be bothered, did not want to be troubled. Just the opposite, in act! He is our judge is so troubled for you, so concerned for you that He goes to Calvary for you. And there He gives His judgment for you. Jesus is condemned and dies in your place, for your sin, for your unfaith, for your un-widow-likeness, so that there be now no condemnation for you. Only life. Only forgiveness. Only good.

This is how God is toward us. Then and still today. Good and faithful and righteous. And when the Son of Man comes, what we may not be able to see clearly now we will see clearly then. When we stand before God we will see how tenderly He has brought us through those dark times, when everything went wrong, and we and our lives seemed widowed and worthless. We will see how generously He has provided for us so that we did not even know the danger that surrounded us or the need that threatened us. We will see how our Father's delaying, His seeming not to care, was simply part of His wanting our good, readying us for larger gifts, the wholeness and fullness of good - His life and salvation.

So yes, God delays, at times. He patiently and lovingly puts up with us, bears with us and our faltering and little faith that doubts and fears and seeks our life apart from Him. *Longsuffering* is the word the Scriptures often use. For your Father is no uncaring judge, but loves you more than you know, more than we should expect. And so He is nurturing you to the bigger and better things He wants to give you. Scouring out the sin and wrong expectations . . . like with Jacob. No small wrestling match was that, that went on all night, that left Jacob injured **and** blessed. So too God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - is working for you.

So how can we do it? So how do we pray in this way, like this widow? How do we pray and not lose heart? Well, I would say, you do already. You do when you pray as Jesus taught you to pray.

*Our Father* - my father who adopted me as His son, His daughter, in Holy Baptism, not because I deserved it but because I didn't, because He loves me . . .

*hallowed be Thy Name* - your name by which we cry out to you; your name by which we know you; your name by which we know that you are good and loving and merciful; your name that you have given to me and placed upon me in baptism . . .

*Thy kingdom come* - your kingdom come to me; keep me in this kingdom, in the faith, in the church, in your love and care . . .

*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven* - on earth. Yes, here and now, your will be done; your will is done. Your mercy, your gifts, your salvation given. Do to me, work in me, according to your will . . .

*Give us this day our daily bread* - and help me be satisfied and thankful for what you give me each day according to your will, be it what I had in mind or not, be it ease or trouble, sunshine or storm, and trust that it is good and for my good . . .

*And forgive me* - forgive me my unfaith, my pride, my attitude, my thanklessness, my doubting you and your love. And through your forgiveness, give me the faith to forgive others, for you are the judge, not me; you are the avenger of wrongs, not me; you died for those sins already . . .

*And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil* - deliver me from the evil one who would plant all kinds of false and deceiving thoughts of you in my mind, and so cause me to follow my own path and desires. Let those wicked weeds not take root in my heart and mind, but only the good seed, the truth of your Word, the truth of your love.

And praying all that, the judgment we cry out for, like this widow, is given. You do not have to wait for the last day, the final judgment. Already Jesus comes to give His

judgment on earth - for the judgment rendered at Calvary is given to you here - as His Word of forgiveness is spoken to you and His Body and Blood given to you. Words that give what they say. And you are given to, mercied, forgiven, raised. For the Son of Man comes now, even as He promised. And faith receives the gifts that He comes and brings. The gifts He freely gives. The gifts He loves to give. The gifts He died to give.

If He delays, it is only for you to grow strong in this faith, in openness to His giving *in ways you might not expect*, and to the always more He wants to give. To make you whole and new and do, as Paul once wrote to the Ephesians, *more than you expect or imagine* (Eph 3:20).

***[So Jesus] told them [this] parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.***

You see, when Jesus told this parable, He was drawing very near to Jerusalem, Very close to the cross. And Jesus knew this would be a time when the disciples would lose heart. But, in fact, Jesus on the cross is not a time to despair, not a time to lose heart. **Jesus on the cross is the certainty of faith.** For we do not pray to a God who is far away in power, who may or may not hear, and may or may not act - like a judge who doesn't want to be bothered - but to a God who hung on a cross for you, has promised to hear, and promised us every good. Which means that even His cross and your cross are good.

***So when the Son of Man comes, will he find such faith on earth?*** Yes He will! For He is working such faith in you. And inviting you to pray - to believe that *He is your true Father and that you are His true child, so that with all boldness and confidence you ask Him as dear children ask their dear father* (Small Catechism, Introduction, Explanation). To cry out to the Lord, in good times and bad. To *Entrust your days and burdens to God's most loving hands* (LSB #754). To Beat on His door and on His ears. He loves such prayers of His children. And He will answer. And He will come. For you.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.