

10/26/22 Luke 18:1-8 "Stewardship with Heart and Voice," Champaign, IL

### **Luke 18:1-8 (NRSV)**

18 Then Jesus<sup>[a]</sup> told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. <sup>2</sup> He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. <sup>3</sup> In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' <sup>4</sup> For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, <sup>5</sup> yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'"<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>6</sup> And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. <sup>7</sup> And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? <sup>8</sup> I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

One morning this week, I was sitting in our big room reading. I could hear our cat meow, meow, meow. He wanted to go out and visit the squirrels. Meow, meow, meow. He wanted to go downstairs. I ignored him. We don't let the cats downstairs unsupervised because they might get locked down there. And, because we have foxes and possums in our yard that might get to the cats if the cats got away, we don't let them outside unless they are on a lease. Meow, meow, meow. I ignored him harder. Then in a flash the cat ran across the room and up the screen, meowing loudly, hanging by his claws at the top of the floor to ceiling window. I had no choice but to get up and peel him off the screen before anymore damage was done. My cat was not going to be ignored!

Such was the persistent cry of the woman in Jesus' parable. She was not going to be ignored. She had a word to say. She had found her voice. She was not going to take no for an answer. I look at many of the protest movements of today who find their voice like this woman did. Those who have been denied for a long time cry the loudest and the longest. They are our modern day prophets. The

prophets had that kind of persistent cry. I think about Habakkuk who said to God, “How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, ‘Violence!’ but you do not save?” Such stories of persistence can be found in action not just in word. There is a powerful story in Genesis 32:22-31 about Jacob when he is on his way to see his long estranged brother Esau. Jacob stole Esau’s birthright so it had the potential to be a terrible event. He has set up several greeting committees to soften Esau’s heart. The night before the big meeting, Jacob is attacked by a man who Jacob is sure is God. Jacob wrestles all night with God. Jacob will not let God go unless God blesses him. Jacob is persistent. God wounds Jacob’s hip but he does bless Jacob with a new name: “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.”

Jesus wanted his disciples to pray with this kind of fervor, with a tenacious and persistent voice. When you pray, Jesus says, speak up, cry out, do it again and again. Jesus must have realized that the disciples would get discouraged in their work, especially after he was gone. They might want to give up. They might not quite understand how the work of a disciple never stops. Prayer is an activity of discipleship that goes on and on and on. Jesus must have known that his disciples might want to hide in the midst of a conflict or the absence of results. The disciples might be tempted to ignore what needs to be said and just stay silent. Jesus knew that life in the kingdom was going to require them to speak up against unjust Judges, come face to face against brick walls, to turn stone hearts into mud. Jesus knew they would need to come to God in prayer, again and again.

The parable of the persistent woman and the unjust judge helped the disciples look ahead to the reality that Jesus was not always going to be with them in person. And, there was going to be suffering and rejection ahead for Jesus. The disciples were going to have to deal with the grief of Jesus’ death and

wait for his return. Jesus tells them he will return but no one will know when; he will come while they are unaware, unexpected. They need hope and trust. Will he find the righteous persistent faith in them that we see in this woman? The prophetic voice of Jesus' parable speaks to us in this way: When we suffer trials and tribulations like these disciples, when we pray in our distress, will we remember the parable like Jesus wants the disciples to remember? Will we persist in prayer?

"And, what shall we pray?" you ask. The prophet Jeremiah encouraged the people to pray for a new covenant and write the law upon their hearts. No one can take away what you know in your heart. (Jeremiah 31) Pray for a heart intent upon God. Pray to know the Lord, to know the Lord who taught us how to love as God loves; to love ourselves, to love our neighbors, yes, but also to love our enemies. Pray to stop putting people into boxes and castes and categories. Pray to look beyond some human contrived notions about who is in and who is out, to give voice to those that don't have it and need it, to lift one another up, to bring about the Peace of Christ.

What shall we pray? Pray to forgive those that persecute you. Pray to have an opportunity to love all the way to the end. Pray, "Forgive me, God." Shout from the mountain top, "Love each other." God, hear our prayer.

Today is Consecration Sunday. We have come forward with our pledges. Today is the day for we have our voices heard, for us to cry out. We have come forward to God with what we need. We have made a commitment to love a little harder, a little longer. Today we have made stewardship a spiritual matter. Robert Bohl says, "Where there is a vibrant, exciting church, that congregation has made stewardship a spiritual matter. For those Presbyterians stewardship has to do with how they live and their daily commitments to Jesus Christ as their Lord.

I once heard a pastor say, "When you give only your money, you give very little; it is when you give of yourself that you truly give."

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/what-we-believe/stewardship/> (May 1997 Presbyterian Today) The Apostle Paul urges his young disciple Timothy to use his voice, "proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage with the utmost patience in teaching..." 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Maybe your prayer as you walked forward today was a little like my crazy cat who just wants to get out of the house. Maybe your prayer was a desire for justice like the woman in the parable. Maybe your prayer was for a stronger commitment in your faith. Maybe you want to pray to God like a bird who sings and sings and sings, like Poet Mary Oliver's bird

#### The Chat

*I wish  
I were  
the yellow chat  
down in the thickets*

*who sings all night,  
throwing  
into the air  
praises*

*and pandhandles,  
plains,  
in curly phrases,  
half-rhymes,*

*free verse too,  
with head-dipping*

*and wing-wringing,  
with soft breast*

*rising into the air-  
mEEK and sleek,  
broadcasting,  
with no time out*

*for pillow-rest,  
everything-  
pathos,  
thanks-*

*Oh, Lord,  
what a lesson  
you send me  
as I stand*

*listening  
to your rattling, swamp-loving chat  
singing  
of his simple, leafy life-*

*how I would like to sing to you  
all night  
in the dark  
just like that.*

So, Sing and pray. Pray and sing to God “just like that.”