

Title: **Persevering in Prayer** Text: Luke 18:1-8

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In my youth I started many things – scouting, piano lessons, athletics, only to grow tired of them and when the going got tough - after a while quit them all. Never finishing anything, I just didn't feel good about myself. So when I got to college and began a Nuclear Engineering program I was determined to see it through. And it was really hard for me. Many times I thought about quitting – it was really tough - studying every day and night including most weekends - but ultimately I persevered and finally graduated with the degree. And it was only possible with the assistance of friends and classmates - other study groups that got me through the difficult assignments. It all paid off in the end but it taught me how, when I was faced with giving up, the encouragement of friends helped me persevere.

My story is simple and almost not worth recalling. Because we all have stories like that. Moments in our lives when, usually as children, we learned how to persevere. And then as you grow older, the trials come. The doctor says he or she found a lump. Your daughter is married to a man not as spiritually discerned as she. You are facing the feelings of extreme loneliness after losing a spouse. Your children stop going to church and Bible study altogether. What once was child's play becomes difficult. It is easy to lose heart. You turn to God in prayer and set it all before him. But you wonder how long you can continue to do this. When will God do something?

If you have ever been in that situation, it is a blessing to be able to listen to our Gospel reading today. Jesus has a word for you and me. In Luke's narrative, Jesus sees that His disciples are about to lose heart. Discipleship has been difficult for them—and it's about to get harder. Jesus has begun to predict his crucifixion, and the disciples don't understand (9:22, 44–45). They've watched as the religious leaders have challenged Jesus. Jesus has called for forgiveness so radical that they fear they cannot do it (17:4–5). And so Jesus pauses to tell them a parable.

As we listen to the parable, it is easy for us to identify with the persistent/determined woman. Perhaps we, like her, having struggled with injustice, having fought to have a voice, having been denied a seat at the table, understand what it is like to be overlooked. It would be easy for us to think that Jesus was giving us an example of a woman who had nothing and yet used everything to continue fighting. It would be easy to look at this parable and to conclude that Jesus was telling us,

“If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.” It would be easy to do that. But it would be wrong.

Notice how Jesus does not ask us to focus on the widow. Even though we are interested in her situation, we don’t hear anything about her case. We don’t hear some secret about how she found the strength to carry on. Instead, Jesus tells us to focus on the judge. In fact, Jesus explicitly says, *“Hear what the unrighteous judge says”* (v 6).

Why on earth would we want to listen to the judge? The judge is arrogant. He does not care about God or about people. The judge is selfish. The only reason he grants the widow justice is to keep her from bothering him anymore. What good could come from listening to an unrighteous, arrogant, selfish person?

Answer: A great deal. You see, Jesus is making a lesser-to-greater argument. He knows that the judge is about the worst person you could encounter. But he wants you to know that if you get justice when you come before an unrighteous judge like that, imagine what will happen when you come before a righteous judge like His Father. Jesus wants us to look at the unrighteous judge so that we treasure all the more fully the righteous judge that God has revealed Himself to be. God truly desires to bring about justice. God cares about people. God not only invites people to pray, but He also promises to listen to their prayers. Jesus knows that what really motivates us for prayer is not a command that we should pray ever more fervently, but rather a promise that God has brought us into His kingdom, where He promises to hear our prayers and to answer them.

The unrighteous judge was selfish. He didn’t want perhaps, his reputation to be tarnished, to be given a black eye by the widow’s constant complaining. On the other hand, Jesus Christ is selfless. He not only wants to bear our burdens, but He also is willing to be crucified that He might carry our sins to the grave and rise again to rule over any suffering that afflicts us. In the death and resurrection of Jesus, God has shown Himself to be loving and faithful. He forgives your sin and promises you life in His kingdom. God Gives of Himself to Save His People. And if Jesus is willing to bear your sins, if Jesus desires to be your Savior, what burden could possibly be too much for Him to bear? What prayer would be too great for Him to hear?

This God who is greater than any self-centered, human judge, this God who is righteous, who seeks to care for His people, who invites His people to come to Him with all of their life’s

burdens, this God has brought you into His kingdom in Baptism and promises the gift of His Spirit to guide you throughout your life. Unlike the judge, Jesus was righteous. Unlike the judge, Jesus was judged. Condemned for our sins and crucified for the entire broken world, Jesus died and rose in order that He might rule over all things and bring about a new creation at the end of the age.

This Jesus comes today to you in this place. This Jesus calls you through this parable and encourages you never to lose heart – don't give up. If you have a prayer request that you are getting tired of making, if you have a burden that you are tired of carrying, if you have a battle that you are tired of fighting, don't give up. Jesus is coming, and He encourages you to carry on. He holds the entire world in His hands, and He is working all things together for your good, for the good of those who love Him.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus invites us to pray to God as your loving Father and He challenges the hearer in Mt 7:7-11 when He emphasizes His followers to Ask, Seek, Knock. Christ's invitation for us to pray "Our Father" is an invitation to a graced life of love, resourced by Him, directed by Him, and even blessed by Him. Imagine Jesus saying it this way: "Just look at your own dads. Even the bad ones give good gifts to their children. How much more does God your heavenly Father desire to give good things to those who ask!"

Prayer's bottom line: even bad dads can give good gifts to their children; but Abba Father, our dear Father in heaven, blesses His children in even greater ways, even better than the best of earthly Fathers. His is a giving saturated with grace – culminating in the ultimate gift of His only Son, Jesus. When you have a Father like that, prayer is a welcomed blessings, isn't it?

(Tell the story of Patrick Henry Hughes.) When you have a father's love like that, prayerful conversation sure is a welcomed blessing, isn't it?

Now, Jesus teaches us that we have that kind of Fatherly love and more! You may have been born blind and weak in sin. Life's adversities may have immobilized you. But your Father believes in you, loves you, has saved you, and now is the grace and power for you as you march through life. Jesus sums this all up as He invites us to approach God boldly, confidently, persistently in prayer. And you can pray faithfully, even if you're struggling today with this image of a loving, listening, caring Father. I know the world in which we live today has its absentee fathers, its uncaring

mothers, its broken families; there's no doubt about that. But that makes Jesus' invitation even more compelling, because God the Father is a Father who can always be counted on for all sons and daughters out there today. Pray often to your heavenly Father with great confidence, that He loves you even more than you can know.

So how can we help one another fight this good fight? What does this look like in action? Well, it can begin by us praying for one another and perhaps even with one another. The widow in the parable is alone. But you are not. Jesus promises that we will never be alone. He has sent His Spirit to be with us, and He has also called us into community so that we are present with one another. Consider how the apostle Paul encourages the church. We are to “*bear one another's burdens*” (Gal 6:2), “*encourage the fainthearted, help the weak*” (1 Thess 5:14), and “*be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might*” (Eph 6:10). Simply asking someone if there is anything you can pray for them about is a good way to begin the conversation and to extend the love of Christ to one another.

And look to the cross and resurrection of Jesus as God's love in action for you – which not only makes prayer possible but also reveals it to be the power of God in your life to change things. Amen.

So pray on, dear friends, pray on! And may God empower you to a life of persistent prayer, praise and thanksgiving in His Name, forever and ever. You will be blessed if you do!

Amen