

If the Unrighteous...

Proper 24

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Luke 18:1-8

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

Are you struggling with something right now? In today's society, it is probably better to assume that you are struggling with something, or several somethings. There are any number of problems that can and do attack you.

So, how long do your struggles last? Just a couple minutes each day? Only a very brief time and then they leave you alone? Or do they, rather, attack you constantly, even to the point of losing sleep over them, several nights of the week? Do you lie awake at night trying to find a solution that never comes?

It seems obvious that many of us have struggles like these. When marquees are set up next to road construction sites or even just on the regular interstates which read "Stay Awake," it seems unlikely that no one is having trouble sleeping. Instead, it seems more likely that more and more of us are having so many troubles that we are consistently losing sleep, some even falling asleep on the road and getting into wrecks so that the government has put up these signs to encourage us to get more sleep.

Our reaction might be: Easy for them to say! And who is the government to tell me to get more sleep? They're the reason I'm up every night! They did this or that, or they didn't do that or this.

Struggles, then, do not bite once and let go. They continue biting down on us and attacking us all day long. So, how often do you pray about your struggles?

Luther wrote in his commentary on the Sermon of the Mount, but referencing our Gospel text from Luke, that "It is not enough just to begin and sigh once, to recite a prayer and then to go away. As your need is, so should your prayer be. Your need does not attack you once and then let you go. It hangs on, it falls around your neck again, and it refuses to let go. You act the same way! Pray continually, and seek and knock, too, and do not let go.' This is the lesson of the parable in Luke 18:1-8 about the widow. She was so persistent and importunate in her refusal to let go of the judge that he was overpowered and had to help her in spite of himself. How much more, Christ argues there..., will God give us if He sees that we do not stop praying but go right on knocking so that He has to hear it?" With Luther's words in mind, let's take a look.

Verse 1

As Luther points out, Luke writes that Jesus tells this parable "to the effect that (the disciples) ought always to pray and not lose heart. (Jesus said), 'In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in the city who kept coming to him and saying, "Give me justice against my adversary.'" For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, "Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'"

Here Jesus lays out the struggle of the widow: she was not being given justice. We are not told what justice she desired, but Jesus does not say that she was asking for something illegally or wrongly. Whatever it was, though, she did not stop asking the judge to give her justice regarding it, approaching him about it over and over again.

Have you given up, or do you continue to go to God in prayer about your struggles? To look briefly at another example, consider our Old Testament text. Jacob was struggling with some severe worries—fearing that his brother Esau was going to kill him and those with him—but when he got the chance, he did not give up

halfway through his wrestling with the Lord. No, he persisted in fighting “until the breaking of the day.” And even then, Jacob, like the widow, did not give up. He demanded that the Lord bless him before he would let him go.

So again, are you giving up on the Lord halfway through the night—halfway through the fight? To go back to Luther, he wrote that to God “persistence is pleasing to Him. Since your need goes right on knocking, therefore, you go right on knocking, too, and do not relent”—whether that knocking is in biting, throwing punches, or knocking on your door.

God has not only commanded that we pray, but also that we pray persistently. How well are you doing in you persistence?

Verse 2

Continuing His speech to the disciples, “the Lord said, ‘Hear what the unrighteous judge says.’”

In other words, Jesus told the Pharisees to look at why the unrighteous judge gave the widow justice. It was not because he believed in God or because he was influenced to do it by his superiors or friends or even family. It was because the widow had been so persistent.

Think about that for a minute. This unrighteous judge was not influenced by God or by others. Consider how often your coworkers or neighbors have probably been encouraged to come to church by a Christian. Hopefully that Christian was and is being persistent with them, but at the same time, too much persistence can cross that line in the sand from being welcoming to being a pest. Let’s say for a minute that the neighbors of this judge were so persistent that he should fear God that he considered them pests. If this were the case, then the judge would have developed a way to ignore requests to come to God from believers.

At the same time, this unrighteous judge did not let others motivate him to do something he did not want to do. He had developed a way, then, to ignore the size of the other men encouraging him to do something, their wealth and influence in the community, and all of those kinds of things. While ignoring believers trying to get you to believe in God is not a noteworthy trait, it is good that this judge refused to be influenced into doing something he did not think was right. But at the same time, he is not to be praised for ignoring the widow’s proper need for justice.

But that’s just the thing—despite learning to avoid and developing techniques to ignore believers and influential people, the judge could not ignore this widow. That’s just how often she came knocking at his door. If there were a line in the sand for being welcoming versus being a pest to this judge, this widow most certainly crossed it. And that is reason why, the judge himself admits, he gave her the justice she desired.

Verse 3

So Jesus concludes asking, “‘And will God not give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?’”

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are God’s elect. We are not the elect by our works—most certainly not. We are God’s elect by the “speedy justice” which Christ brought by His death on the cross, which would happen shortly after our text. It is by *His* works and His works *alone* that we are saved from our sins, and made God’s elect.

As God's elect, then, Jesus gives us one last thing to consider: "will he find faith on the earth?" This whole parable has been about how God will certainly answer the prayers of His elect if even an unjust judge will grant the request of a widow. Yet what does it take to pray so fervently? How can Luther tell us to act the same way? Only by faith.

The source of our faith is in God and His promises. Certainly in the promise of salvation that we have in Christ for the forgiveness of sins, but also in God's promise to hear us when we pray in faith. The gospel of it is, you don't have to do anything to earn that kind of faith; you've been given it by the receiving of God's Holy Spirit when He called you through His Word and through the waters of Holy Baptism. So you have the Spirit and you have faith as gifts from God. And these gifts allow you to trust, as Luther puts it: "(h)ow much more...God (will) give us if He sees that we do not stop praying but go right on knocking so that He has to hear it(.) This is all the more so because He has promised to (hear us) and shows that persistence is pleasing to Him. Since your need goes right on knocking, therefore, you go right on knocking, too, and do not relent. For you have His Word, and He will have to say: 'All right, then, you may have what you want.'" In Jesus' Name and for His sake. Amen.