

“Let Faith Arise—Part 3”
October 16, 2016
Twenty-second Sunday After Pentecost
Text: Luke 18:1-8

Island Heights UMC, Island Heights, NJ

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.

He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.'

For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'"

And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them.

And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Introduction

Will Jesus find faith on earth? Today we are at Part 3 in the series “Let Faith Arise.” The focus today is on prayer and how faith and prayer are interconnected, and what it means for us as twenty-first century North American disciples of Jesus Christ—people who, even two thousand years after the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, follow what is called the Way. It is the goal of this five part series to learn more about faith and that our faith itself will be stirred up—faith, even faith the size of a mustard seed, can do the impossible, faith that believes it is God’s desire to bring healing, and as we see today, faith that is fueled by the practice of prayer.

We are in the gospel of Luke and Jesus is teaching a large crowd. What do you say to a mixed audience of disciples, followers, curious seekers and religious leaders who want to know more about the kingdom of God, and the future of the world?

Jesus tells them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.

A Widow and a Judge

Jesus says, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people."

"In that same city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.'"

A judge and a widow. It's a picture sharply contrasting power and the lack of power; a position of authority and complete absence of any position.

Jesus does not particularly depict the judge in a good light. He is the antithesis of living out the Great Commandment, which is to love God, and your neighbor as yourself. This judge has no fear of God, meaning he does believe, and he does not respect people. He answers to no one but himself.

Then there is the persistent widow who just keeps coming back. She will not back down, and will not quit until she gets what she must have. Not an easy life once you become a widow. No more protection, no more income. Living on the mercy of others. But she does not lose heart. Her faith is strong, and she has a voice. Do you hear that voice? She lifts the voice that cries out for justice.

Two characters who are worlds apart, separated by the unfolding of circumstance and held in their respective places, for better or worse, by the ordering of society at that time.

Justice Granted

But then there is a shift. The story turns a corner. The dynamic tension between the widow and the judge finally snaps. As Jesus tells it,

"For a while the judge refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'"

Yes! She has been heard! Even if in this case to only be satisfied by a judge who had grown tired of her persistence. One of our deepest needs as human beings created in the image of God is to be heard. And so it is with the widow who cried out for justice.

And Jesus says something else, *"Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them."*

These are prophetic words. Jesus speaks of God's chosen ones. The people of Israel who for generations had been waiting for the Messiah, praying day and night for hundreds of years for the one who would come and deliver them.

And now God sends Jesus. The God Man. The Divine steps into the world as a human being and recalibrates the trajectory of history, and redeems the stories of our lives.

Hear the good news of grace through faith: for those who believe there is forgiveness of sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. In the chapter leading up to today's parable Jesus is teaching this crowd on that day, the living, breathing manifestation of God on earth and they are wondering about the coming kingdom, asking when it will come. "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you."

He looks them in the eye knowing he will soon go to the cross and asks them *"Will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them."*

The Lingering Question

And yet, there's another question. It's the key question for today's message.

When the Son of Man comes, Jesus asks, will he find faith on earth?"

It's the question that lingers on...in our world; in our individual specific lives, and in our experience as a collective humanity. Will Jesus find faith on earth? Did he mean would he find faith when he came the first time, born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth, and crucified in Jerusalem? Yes. Did he mean when he comes in the eschaton, meaning in the end, in the time when God's kingdom comes fully on earth as it is in heaven? Yes. And does he mean will he find faith when he comes now and knocks on the doors of our lives? In our homes, our communities, our country? Yes. When the Son of Man comes will he find faith on earth?

Jesus tells this parable to exhort us to always pray and to not lose heart; to keep the faith. This is why we continue to interact with God through this ongoing, relational conversation called prayer. It's a vital spiritual practice because prayer and faith are forever intertwined. One's existence depends on the other. Our faith is a gift from God planted in us by the Holy Spirit causing us to know at a profound level who Jesus is. And we say, "Let that faith arise!" That kind of faith is nurtured and matured through prayer.

Our Mission

A scholar of the parables of Jesus, Klyne Snodgrass, says it like this: "The evidence of faithfulness and a primary path to alertness and faithfulness is prayer, constant involvement with God as we interpret and deal with the world in which we live." Prayer is an ongoing, relevant discussion with God about life, and the world, and our place in it.

Let us be truthful. The world is in a situation in which our healthy way forward will only be possible through a spiritual awakening. As human beings on our own we continue to resort to the fallible means by which we live our lives. Ours is a nation which will remain divided until we transcend our differences through reconciliation possible by "constant involvement" with God. This happens through prayer. We must be like the widow. Our cry for justice must rise up, we must persist, and then we will be heard.

Let us be even more truthful. Our individual lives are in a situation in which our own best way forward will only happen through our own spiritual awakening. On our own we constantly take the wrong turns and go the wrong way and, in the end, lose hope. But when faith comes, that great gift from God, and we cultivate that faith through prayer, lives are turned around and transformation begins.

So pray. Pray together, pray alone. There are many ways to pray. (provide some examples here) But just pray. A lot.

As we wonder about the future and how the kingdom of God will finally and fully come to earth as it is in heaven, we must remember and follow the instruction from Jesus to pray always and to not lose heart. Keep that faith. Let that faith arise! Amen.