

SERMON

+ Lectionary 29 C (Pentecost 19)

October 19, 2025

Jesus has been teaching his disciples
about how to prepare themselves
for the coming of the day of the Lord –
the fulfillment of the kingdom of God and the promises of God
and the judgment of all people.

And to illustrate one of his points
about staying strong in the faith,
Jesus tells this story
about one of the lowliest of all people
in the society of his time – a widow –
and one of the most despicable, self-centered judges
you could imagine,
and how she finally received justice from him
because she persisted and she did not lose heart.

There was plenty that was stacked against her, to be sure:
her lowly status over against his authority,
and his total lack of moral grounding or compassion for anyone.
Even the judge's decision to help her
wasn't because of her or her need,
but because of his own self-interest.

Yet, despite all that was against her,
she did not lose heart, and she just kept asking.
And in the end, he did help her.

And the gist of the story for Jesus is the stark contrast
between this despicable, self-centered judge
and the lovingkindness, grace, and mercy of God,
and saying, if this unjust judge does right,
even for the wrong reasons,
imagine what God – who is eager to love,
and who goes to great lengths to save his beloved children –
imagine what God will do.

So, Jesus tells his disciples and us –
 both at the very beginning, to introduce the story,
 and in a veiled way with his probing question at the end –
 he says, just keep at it.
 And don't lose heart.

Because, to put it plain and simple,
 what he's really talking about is living our faith,
 doing what Jesus' disciples do,
 living according to the promise
 God made with us in baptism
 to be God's own beloved children.

Being a person of faith helps us to know
 where to go for help and encouragement to stay strong.
 It is, of course, to go to God in prayer,
 to share our needs and hurts,
 our concerns, fears, and discouragement.
 Praying is really acting out our faith.

Being persistent in prayer is really
 just keeping on doing our faith –
 the kind of faith we've been hearing about from Jesus
 over the last several weeks.

It's about being and living in
 a relationship with Jesus,
 trusting that Jesus is present with us
 and that God's promise is true.

We heard last week, for example,
 how the one Samaritan leper
 whose skin was cleared
 came back to thank Jesus.
 And his obedience in even going to the priest
 as Jesus commanded,
 and his coming back in praise and thanksgiving
 were really expressions of his relationship with Jesus –

his trust and faith in him.

Today Jesus teaches us that
another expression of that faith and relationship
is a continuing, regular, even persistent
conversation with God in prayer.

Prayer is about nurturing a relationship
with one we love and trust – with Jesus –
by sharing with him the things that matter most to us.

But, it's not about getting what we want.
Whenever we think of God
as an eternal vending machine
ready to spit out what we've ordered,
we've missed the point,
and we will surely be disappointed.

That's when some people begin to wonder
why God didn't answer their prayer,
or if God answers prayer at all.

The point of Jesus' story
isn't that the woman got justice as she asked,
but that she was persistent in seeking it and didn't lose heart.
Jesus told us that was the point of the story before he told it.

The truth is that the content and result of our prayer
are secondary to the act of praying itself.
It's about nurturing our relationship
and sharing our joys and fears,
our hopes and concerns,
and our reflections and gratitude with God.

Now, of course, we DO talk to God
about the things we want and need –
these things matter to us.
That's always part of the conversation.

But the point of our prayer
is not to get what we want,
but to be open, regular, and honest –
even about what we want –
to be persistent and to trust and not lose heart
in our communication with the God who loves us to death.

And, as you know – because I keep reminding you –
Jesus does this – he stops to tell this story –
as he takes his final steps on the road to Jerusalem.

He has set this face there in order to die on the cross
for them and for us,
so that in that faith, we can be united directly and personally
with the God who pours out the Holy Spirit of life in us,
calls us beloved children,
and heals us with the wholeness of salvation
and the promise of life
in Jesus' own resurrection from death.

On his way to the cross,
Jesus stops here to teach one more point
about faith and discipleship –
about being persistent in prayer.

Just talk to God about what you need,
what matters to you, how it's going.
And keep doing it; don't lose heart.
Trust that Jesus is present with you,
that God keeps his promises,
and that God can and will hear and answer.

Because that is living faith,
and faithfully living in
the salvation, peace, and wholeness
that God is happy to give us.