

Genesis 32:22-31

Luke 18:1-8

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

“We lift our eyes to the hills;
our help comes from the Lord!” AMEN!

When we are called to prayer, it is
to foster our relationship with God.

In truth, all world religions speak of
developing habits of meditation or prayer
in order to connect with a Higher Power.

An invitation to slow down and to meet
with the One who inspires and offers a chance
for a relationship;

not just a chance but finding there's God
who deeply desires this.

The push back from us is that
we are leading busy lives, right?

We are a people pulled in many directions and
coming apart at the seams.

When we find a moment for prayer, we
may be reluctant to take it, for we
desire instant answers and results.

It's no secret, we are trained to

get and give immediate feedback and
when it doesn't happen

the natural response is
to do something different because
my prayer did not seem to work. (Pause)

Yet, today's parable is a reminder for us
about the persistence in prayer and how it is
a way to express our true nature,
that is, we are strugglers/wrestlers.

One with a goal to never lose hope and
to find a way to peace.

Peace with one another and a peace with God. (Pause)

It was about ten years ago, while I stood at
the door following worship to greet people on
their way out of church.

An usher tapped me on the shoulder and
said there was an emergency phone call for me.

I asked if I could take the call after shaking hands
and he said the person told him there'd
been a death.

I excused myself from the line

and went to the phone.

The call was from the emergency
department at Bay Medical.

A family had requested they call me to come
and meet them in a room.

“How can I help?” I asked.

There had been an accidental
death of a child by gunshot.

The words still ring in my ears.

What can I do? What will I say?
Questions that ran through my head
on the way to the hospital...

Upon arrival, the room was silent.

The dad was there and his mom and dad
were there, as well as a young boy of
two or three years old.

The child made the only sound in the room
as he played with his cars on the table.

The dad never took his eyes off his boy

while the grandparents explained to me
what had happened.

While brother and sister were playing
in a separate room, the dad
(who was in training to be a police officer)
was cleaning his firearm.

The gun went off.

The bullet went through a wall and
hit his 6 year old daughter and killed her
instantly while she played with
her younger brother.

The desire to minister the survivors of
this tragedy was strong, but it was clear
that I did not have the words or
the ability that could change
what had happened.

There was no way to right the wrong,
no way to inspire a “chin up” response,
no way to lift the burden that was felt
by the father and the family and
about to hit their surrounding
community.

It was a time of complete helplessness.

With nothing to say or do, we simply
remained in the room together and
shared the silence of the unspeakable
and unthinkable.

But there was one thing that helped allow me
to keep silent and stay, and that one thing
was constant prayer.

Nothing out loud, but it was the only answer
in the present moment... constant prayer...
nothing else would do. (Pause)

Anyone who has lived a life of relationship;
everyone who has loved knows
an experience of anguish, loss,
or regret.

You may even be recalling something similar
in your own life when you felt helpless,
speechless, and had a realized inadequacy
to fix any of it.

There was nothing in the toolbox
to solve the situation.

Only the dependence of prayer. (Pause)

This parable that Jesus told teaches
about persistent prayer.

It is sometimes called the Parable of
the Widow and the Unjust Judge, and in
part of it, there is clarity.

Luke said that “Jesus told them a parable
about their need to pray and not lose heart.”

No need for us to guess what the parable means
but there is a feeling that as the parable unfolds...

there’s this message that God is a bit
like this unjust judge.

Anyone who has experienced
the tragedies of life wonder how
the tragic things could have come to be
if God is just and merciful?

How could a merciful and loving God
let this or that happen?

It is in these times when I’ll admit that
I don’t have much faith in a just God...
so what then?

In the dark night of the soul,

what is there to do?

Well, to not sound trite, but I turn
to Jesus and so can you.

We can be reminded about this
woman and recall her persistence.

It is a persistence that is born out of faith
to lead her to ask again and again;
to be relentless.

She wrestled with the unjust judge to
win him over to do the right thing.

Just as Jacob wrestled God in Genesis to win
over a blessing even if it meant
he'd die at sunrise...

He didn't give up until God said, "Yes."

But, the event changed his walk, yet still he came
to a new beginning.

Persistent until God said, "Yes."

(Intro. Caroline to speak about Habitat for Humanity)

Stories, like ones we share remind us

that today's actions have something to do
with tomorrow's results.

That in prayer -
faith and trust are connected, but
there's a wrestling, too.

A struggle necessary and a persistence in attitude
that desires to be in communion with God
through prayer and through
hands-on activities like working
with Habitat for Humanity

because there are times when we don't
have any agency, like the unnamed widow
before the judge.

She was powerless socially, economically
and politically but she was
powerful prayerfully.

There are other times, though, when
we **do** have agency to make
positive changes to society.

In our voting, in our caring for people without
homes and for people that are hungry...

we have agency to be God's answer

to their persistent prayers.

And we celebrate the ways St. Stephen
has won struggles in equity and justice work.

Knowing there's still much to do and
(like the widow in the parable) we have
the persistence to do it, together.

Let us look up on our walk, be persistent and claim
the promise of God's liberating love,
no matter what!

AMEN!