

Sermon ✝ October 16, 2022

Luke 18:1-8

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There are some things within our religion that we don't like anyone to fool around with. There are some things, we say, that are personal. "It's just between God and me."

There are some things, that once we learn how to do them, we don't think we need improvement. Prayer is one of those things.

We are somewhat touchy when it comes to prayer. We don't always like to have some outsider interfere with that dimension of our faith expression. But I daresay, all of us could do with a little more instruction concerning prayer.

In this morning's gospel, Jesus instructs his disciples and us by using a very intriguing parable. He tells of a woman who was very persistent in getting results from a certain judge. He wasn't about to help . . . but she kept after him and he finally agreed to help.

The point of this parable is the necessity of continual prayer. And persistence alone is not enough. We must also be faithful in our praying.

Let's look at those two dimensions of prayer this morning.

First: persistence. We need to be people who realize the necessity of continual prayer. This doesn't mean every minute of every day. (We are not to become monks or nuns). However, it does mean that we should be communicating with God more than just when it suits our needs.

We need to be like the widow. We need to be persistent about our praying.

A pastor tells of visiting a certain European country where he stopped at a particular monastery to view a famous painting which he knew was kept there. When he arrived at the main door he found it closed and locked. He used the door knocker a few times, but there was no answer. After he had knocked a few more times, there was still no answer. Since he was certain that someone must be there, he became persistent in his knocking. Finally, after he had knocked about fifty times, a monk came and opened the door.

The visitor, somewhat perturbed by the delay in answering the door, said, *"You seem to have plenty of time here; I have knocked for a very long time."* "Oh, yes," replied the monk, *"we heard it right from the beginning. But we have some boys in the neighborhood who use the door knocker for fun. When we come to open the door, they run away. So we have made it a rule to wait for a time to see whether the caller has come with a serious intention."*

How often do we give up and quit after we have prayed for only a few times? While we have no right to do so, we believe that God should hear our prayer and answer immediately. Perhaps God is waiting to see if we are serious about our intentions.

And when we pray, it doesn't matter how we pray. God is not concerned about our physical posture but rather our spiritual posture.

Some Old Testament saints fell on their faces before God. Others stood with eyes lifted up. Jesus sometimes knelt.

Someone has vividly expressed this all in a little poem:

*“The proper way for man to pray,”
said Deacon Lemuel Keyes,
“The only proper attitude is down upon his knees.”*

*“Nay, I should say the way to pray,”
said Reverend Doctor Wide,
“Is standing straight with outstretched arms
with rapt and upturned eyes.”*

*“Oh, no, no, no,” said Elder Snow,
“such posture is too proud.
A man should pray with eyes fast-closed
and head contritely bowed.”*

*“Last year I fell in Hodgkin's well headfirst,” said Cyril Brown.
“With both my heels a-stickin' up, my head a point'in down,
And I done prayed right then and there; best prayer I ever said,
The prayin'est prayer I ever prayed, a-stand'in on my head.”*

The essence of prayer is to come to God humbly, reverently, and gratefully; sensing your total dependence upon God for forgiveness and help.

We must realize that prayer should not always be some cheap, quick, and easy answer. If prayer were an Aladdin's lamp, bringing anything we might fancy by instant magic, the light of prayer would lose much of its reality.

This brings us to the second aspect of prayer: we must be faithful in our praying. This is really the most difficult part.

When we talk about faith in relation to our prayers, we are talking about the sense of trusting our relationship with God . . . knowing that God is there even in the midst of difficulties.

Years ago, a retired Army chaplain, William Reiss, wrote of an incident in World War II when he and a doctor remained in a basement “hospital” with ninety wounded men who couldn't be moved. “The enemy was coming closer and closer,” Reiss recalled, “firing and throwing grenades. I heard one go off in the house next door. I said that we should begin to pray. We bowed our heads and began the Lord's Prayer. By chance, I looked up and saw a German soldier outside the basement

window with a grenade in his hand. I closed my eyes and waited for the thing to go off. As we got to the part, 'forgive us our trespasses,' I looked up again and saw the soldier standing with his head bowed. When we finished the prayer, he put down the grenade and went on his way."

Reiss went on to tell how he met the soldier after the war in a POW camp and how the man eventually became a pastor.

The point of this story the whole notion of praying and trusting that God is there even when the situation seems hopeless.

One final comment of prayer. And we must add this every time we talk about prayer. I'm sure you already know what I'm going to say: God answers prayer . . . but according to God's time table, not ours.

We cannot force God's hand or make God answer our prayers so everything works out for us. To understand prayer in this way is to truly have faith.

May we all take this parable to heart.

May we understand the need for continual prayer in our lives.

And may we be like the widow, persistent in our praying. And may it be persistence born of faith.

Faith in a God who is always there in both the bright and dark moments of our lives.

Faith in a God who hears the prayers of his people.

The same God in whose name we gather this day and say, Amen.