

Last week, we looked at a fairly straightforward miracle story and tried to see it from a different perspective to find hidden clues that pointed to deeper meaning. This week, I think we will be up to something similar.

Our text is relatively familiar. A parable that many of us who have grown up in church will recognize. But traditional interpretation is not all the parable has to tell us. So, let's dive into our text from Luke chapter 18.

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. <sup>2</sup>He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. <sup>3</sup>In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my accuser.' <sup>4</sup>For a while he refused, but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, <sup>5</sup>yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.' " <sup>6</sup>And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. <sup>7</sup>And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? <sup>8</sup>I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

This is the word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

Now at the beginning of this scripture, Luke writes, Jesus spoke the parable in order to teach his disciples something about prayer and persistence in prayer. The text literally explains to us the why. That's a rare gift! Sometimes we just don't know why Jesus says something, so we're in luck today! The story is about how we are to pray not once, not twice, but always. We are to cry out to God both day and night.

How can the text be more clear? We are to pray and not lose heart. Pray for peace in Israel and Gaza and not give up. Pray for Russia to retreat back behind original borders and allow Ukraine to live in peace. Even though these places have known war for two and three

years, respectively, we are to keep praying. Pray for the hungry to find food, even though that prayer will never be retired. Pray for the homeless to find shelter, even though there will always be people living in cars. Pray for our children to be happy, healthy, and safe. We are to pray and pray and pray regardless of how many times we've prayed or how we think those prayers are being answered or unanswered.

And indeed, I add my voice to the chorus. I echo the years of preaching that implores you all to pray without ceasing. Pray and do not lose heart. Pray night and day for God's kingdom to come and God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Yes?

We pray those words every week. Does anyone here ever think, "you know, maybe we've said that enough. Maybe we could skip it this week. Or maybe we should say something different." No. We will pray the Lord's Prayer each and every Sunday.

So, that's the parable, in a nutshell. Last week, I had some of you fooled when I said that the sermon could end right then and there – at a similar point to where we are today. Some people in the choir even had the audacity to clap at the thought of a 4-minute sermon, but you know better now, right? Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on the pastor for leading you to believe you'll get home 10 minutes early.

Friends, prayer is indeed fruitful and necessary, and we should pray without ceasing, from the moment we rise until our going to sleep. Prayer should be as natural as breathing. As comfortable as a conversation with your best friend.

But this passage is not just about prayer. Oh no. Faith and prayers are necessary, but James 2:14-17 says, "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead." Thoughts and prayers are not enough, my beloved ones. We need more.

This woman in our text was more than a prayer warrior. She did not merely have faith that God would care for her and provide for her needs and bring justice. The Bible does not

say that she went to the temple daily and spent the day in prayer. It says she went daily to the judge to plead for help regarding an injustice.

Now, I know, metaphorically, the point of the parable is that going to the judge and praying to God are meant to imply the same kind of persistent asking, but I see more than thoughts and prayers in what the widow does. I see the widow as the matriarch of non-violent protesting.

This woman, she doesn't have a name nor does she have a husband, she is a widow—one of the most vulnerable figures in ancient society. And she is up against a judge who neither fears God nor respects people. He is not interested in justice. He is interested in power.

And yet, she keeps showing up.

Day after day, she knocks on his door. "Grant me justice," she says. Not vengeance. Not privilege. Just justice. And eventually, the judge relents—not because he's had a change of heart, but because her persistence wears him down.

Do you imagine this woman discretely made her way to the judge's home in the early morning hours, quietly knocked on his door, and, in barely more than a whisper, asked him to help her? Do you think she privately kept the matter to herself when she went to the well with other women? Maybe. But I can imagine that, eventually, after getting nowhere for so long, I imagine all of her neighbors knew about her situation, just like everyone in Burnsville, NC knows the names of those who lost their homes in the hurricane last year. Every car that passed our job sites, the mailman, the school bus driver, every child on the bus all knew the houses we were working on belonged to women who have been living in campers and using a port-a-potty in their front yard for the last fourteen months because in a community like that, their stories, and the widow's story, were no secret.

Each day, the widow went to the judge's door. Each day she pled for justice. And each day the community witnessed her plight. This story is not just about the widow and

the judge. It's about public opinion, too. The judge is not just hearing her plea, he's hearing the community gossip about her plight, and it is growing due to his inaction.

Moral or not, a man of God or not, this judge can see the writing on the wall. The widow is not going away. Public sympathy for her is growing, and he dreams of a day when he is uninterrupted by her presence.

Because despite her lowly status, this widow is not passive. She is not dainty. She is not waiting for the system to work. She is demanding that it work. And she does so without violence, without bribery, and without giving up.

Her story echoes through history in every moment, every movement where seemingly powerless people have refused to be silent in the face of injustice or give up after one failed attempt at change.

The widow in Jesus' parable does not have weapons. She has no army. She doesn't even have the courts. He is the judge. But she has resolve. She has righteousness. And she has the audacity to believe that even an unjust judge can be moved.

Jesus lifts her up not just as a model of prayer, but as a model of faith. Luke didn't have in his vocabulary the term non-violent protest, or I believe that the scripture would have said, "Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and how to practice non-violent protest."

And at the end of the parable, when Jesus asks, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" I believe faith, in this context, is not just thoughts and prayers — it's thoughts and prayers and action for justice. It's persistence. It's the kind of holy stubbornness that refuses to let go of hope. The kind that gave her strength to walk up to the judge day after day after day.

In our own lives, we may not face corrupt judges, but we do face systems that are unjust. We see inequality, exclusion, and indifference. And we may be tempted to lose heart. We may pray and pray and see no change. We may give a few cans of soup to Jonnycake every once in a while, but we know it will never end the community's hunger.

But the widow reminds us: keep showing up.

Keep praying. Keep speaking. Keep knocking. Keep protesting about injustice.

Nonviolent protest is not just a political strategy—it is a spiritual discipline. It is the embodiment of hope. It is the widow’s cry, amplified across generations and around the world.

And it is deeply biblical.

The prophets protested against those in power to bring justice. Jesus protested against those in power to bring justice. The early church protested. Not with swords, but with truth. Not with violence, but with love. Not with silence, but with singing.

Even the Psalms are full of protest—cries for justice, for healing, for God to act. “I lift up my eyes to the hills – from where will my help come?” is not a question of despair. It is a question of faith. “My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.”

So what does this mean for us?

It means that we must do more than send thoughts and prayers when justice is lacking. Our faith must be active. And our witness must be public.

It means that when we see injustice—in our communities, in our churches, in our world—we do not turn away. We do not just grieve in our sanctuaries and homes and pray for God to comfort those who are hurting. We turn toward those who are like the judge and say, “Grant me justice.”

It means that we teach our children not just to be kind but to be courageous. That we honor not just quiet devotion but bold discipleship.

It means that we recognize protest as prayer, and prayer as protest. That we see our faith not as a retreat from the world, but as a call to transform it. Think of Rosa Parks, who sat down so others could stand up. Think of the lunch counter sit-ins, the marches across bridges, the songs sung in jail cells. Think of Gandhi’s salt march, of farm workers striking for fair wages, of women marching for the right to vote. These are examples from the 1900s

of modern-day widows—people who persist, who protest, who pray with their feet, and whose actions brought changes that we now take for granted.

Nonviolent protest is not weakness nor is it political. It is strength under control. It is the refusal to let injustice have the last word. It is rooted in the greatest commandments – to love the Lord our God with all of our hearts and minds and souls and strength and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. It is the belief that truth, when spoken boldly and peacefully, can shake the foundations of power. It is exemplified in the soul-changing, non-violent protest of our Lord Jesus Christ, who chose to take up the cross and not the sword and calls us to do the same. It is echoed by the late John Lewis who taught non-violence protest as the way of following Christ – by training protestors to love their enemies, embrace redemptive suffering, and surround themselves with the beloved community.

God is not the unjust judge. God does not need to be worn down. God is already listening. Already moving, and already on the side of the weak and vulnerable.

And God invites us to participate—to be persistent, prayerful, and prophetic.

So let us be like the widow.

Let us be like those who approach the places and people of power and persist in our cries for justice. Let us remember those who marched, who sang, who sat, who stood so that women could have credit cards, so that workers had overtime pay and weekends and safety standards, so that our siblings with darker skin could ride the same bus and stay at the same hotel and eat at the same restaurant.

Let us be people of holy persistence.

Because justice may be delayed, but it is not denied.

And faith that refuses to give up is the kind that moves mountains. Thoughts and prayers, yes. Thoughts and prayers and protest, yes and amen.