

Persistent Faith

October 19, 2025

Luke 18:1-8

¹ Jesus was telling them a parable about their need to pray continuously and not to be discouraged. ² He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected people. ³ In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him, asking, ‘Give me justice in this case against my adversary.’ ⁴ For a while he refused but finally said to himself, I don’t fear God or respect people, ⁵ but I will give this widow justice because she keeps bothering me. Otherwise, there will be no end to her coming here and embarrassing me.” ⁶ The Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ Won’t God provide justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he be slow to help them? ⁸ I tell you, he will give them justice quickly. But when the Human One comes, will he find faithfulness on earth?”



In verse, 1 Jesus tells us that this is a parable about the disciples needing to pray always and to not be discouraged. And by praying always, we usually think that means asking for stuff. So, yeah, we think, if even the mean-hearted judge acquiesces, won't God? Yes. Traditionally, in this parable, we see the unjust judge in the role of God, and we see ourselves in the role of the widow, the one who was persistent in her efforts. But this understanding does not match reality. In truth, God is a God of justice, not a God of injustice. God is not a God that we need to badger with our prayers, overloading God until God finally gives us what we want. God is a good and loving God who gives us what we need. Sometimes, as it is in this parable, justice is something that we need. When our prayer aligns with who God is and with what God desires for our life and our world, then, yes, our faithful and steadfast God will respond quickly, as Jesus states in verse 8.

With all this in mind, we must then ask: who is who in this story? Who, though told “do not judge,” judges anyway? We do. Who cares for neither God nor humans? That would often be us. And who continually pleads for justice? That would certainly be God. The judge does not represent God in this story; the widow does. We are the unjust judge. So for Jesus, in this parable, prayer is not making about demands: it is about listening. The reality is because God comes to us again and again pleading for justice. God comes, pleading with us through the voices of the humble, the powerless, the poor, the sick and rejected, the orphan and the widow, the marginalized.



And even though all of these voices and more cry out to us again and again, we don't always listen. But God is steadfast and true. God is faithful. Yes, our persistent God will wear us down with his or her insistent coming, crying out again and again, over and over, until we relent. Yes, we need to pray — that is, to listen. We do need to pray always and to not lose heart, that is, to not lose our love for God and for the other. This love is revealed in our willingness to listen to their cries and to respond as justice-seekers. As we prepare to spend some time in this parable, let us begin with a word or prayer...



Turning to verses 2 and 3, we meet the two characters in the parable about persistent prayer. First, we meet the judge: “*There was a judge who neither feared God nor respected people.*” The judge only cared about himself. Justice? From the judge’s perspective, justice was for those who could afford it. This theme remains very relevant in today’s world! Next, we meet the widow: “*There was a widow who kept coming to him, asking, ‘Give me justice.’*” The widow was relentless, coming to the judge again and again, asking for justice.

This is really what the parable is about: justice. This poor widow did not have the customary means to achieve justice. She had no bribe to offer. So, she came to the judge again and again and again.

In this parable, Luke seems to be saying to just keep at it. Just keep at it until you get an answer. Hang in there, keep chipping away. This idea aligns with Jesus' teaching on praying continually and being undiscouraged when the answer does not come right away. This is not always easy to do, is it? In verse 7 Jesus asks, *"Won't God provide justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he be slow to help them?"* In reality, at times we do have to respond with something along these lines: "Well, yes, sometimes, in our experience, God delays. Sometimes painfully so." Yes, there are people in our church, and there are likely people here this morning, who have worn out their knees and shed many tears in persistent prayer but are not or were not able to see an answer that comes close to answering their prayers. It is hardest, in times like these, to read a verse like this and to not question God or our faith or the truth of these words.

"Won't God provide justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he be slow to help them?"

- Luke 18:7



While Luke tells us that Jesus is offering these words that we read today as teaching on persistent prayer, in the actual text we do not learn much about prayer or about how to pray. The widow does not actually pray, and the unjust judge certainly does not pray. But we can infer from the widow's behavior – going to the judge again and again and again – that in our prayer life we are to practice the habit of prayer in this same manner. We are to keep going to God, bringing our prayers before God over and over and over, *"day and night"* as the parable says. And, eventually, the answer will come.

In the moment we may not like it or may not understand it. It may take years for us to realize what God's answer was. As we persist, we can trust that our God is faithful and that our God works all things for our good.

In the context of this parable, God is the God of justice. Within this parable, Jesus is once again teaching that God's justice is weighed most heavily in favor of the vulnerable and the powerless. In this parable, that is the widow. Jesus is also reminding us that God demands justice most vehemently from those in power – the prophets, the priests, the judges, and from all others with voice and standing. We have voice and standing. The question for us, then, is this: Do we use our voice and standing to demand justice in our world today?

With this question in mind, we return to the thoughts that we began with: What if the woman who begs and pleads and makes a noisy nuisance of herself is not us, but God? And what if the unjust

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one, the one who has no fear of God and does not have respect for anyone else is not God, but us? Throughout the scriptures, God is clearly a God of justice. The Bible is clear about what justice looks like and about how it should work in our world. Justice has been declared and it has been defined. But because of selfishness and greed, because of prejudice and fear, as it was in the day of the unjust judge, today justice is not always given to those who need it but is commonly only available to those who can afford it, to those with the power to force the issue. We – we the church and we as individuals – yes, we have the resources, and we have the power to ensure that justice is the norm, rather than the exception in our society.

With this thought in the air, let us ask ourselves this first question: In what ways is God currently begging and pleading and making a noisy nuisance, all in an attempt to get us to see and do something about the injustices in our world?

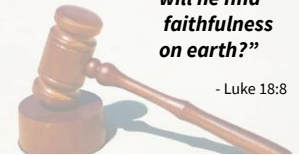
Put another way, where has or is the Holy Spirit bringing an awareness about injustice to your heart, seeking to afflict the comfortable?

And this leads to this second question: How do our non-responses to this begging, pleading, and repeated prodding from God make us look like we have no fear of God and no respect for anyone but ourselves? To consider our non-response is so important because when there is an injustice in our community and we ignore it or fail to act or to speak out, then to the widows and other vulnerable people today, we look a lot more like the unjust judge than a devoted follower of Christ.

Perhaps this is why Jesus asks this question at the end of the parable: *“But when the Human One comes, will he find faithfulness on earth?”* Jesus wants to know, will he find faithful disciples living out their faith? I believe that the answer to this question will connect to whether or not we have learned to hear and to respond to God’s voice as God begs, pleads, and prods us to be people who love and care well for our neighbor, especially for the vulnerable and powerless. If we have learned to hear and to respond, then justice will be the norm in our society and in our world.

***“But when the Human One comes,
will he find
faithfulness
on earth?”***

- Luke 18:8



Hearing and responding to God’s call for justice begins in prayer. That is probably why Jesus used this parable to teach the disciples about persistent prayer. It is when we still our minds, when we get quiet before God, it is then that the Spirit can bring the people and situations to our hearts so that we can then respond to the injustices in our world. As we have talked about before, praying should lead to doing, especially when we can be a part of the answer to that prayer. The widow in our story gives us a great example of praying as doing.

The widow was praying as she stood vigil outside the judge's door. She was praying as she pled for justice. She was praying as she made such a nuisance of herself day after day.

When we, as disciples of Jesus, are told to be persistent in our prayers, we are being told to stand vigil, to knock on doors, to speak for the vulnerable, to cry out for justice day after day – all to confront injustices and other wrongs when they are happening in our society.

As it was with the widow in this parable, prayer, persistence, and faith are still the tools we use to bring about justice in the world. Step one is awareness. This was the root of the question asked during the passing of the peace: Where do you see injustice in our community or in our little part of the world? Were there answers that anyone would be willing to share – whether your answer or an answer that you heard and agreed with?

There are many situations and circumstances where we can fight against injustice. To name them is the first step. This leads to action. Understanding that action does not always bring immediate results, the next thing that Jesus emphasized was not giving up, not losing heart. This is important to remember because change can come very slowly. And sometimes, in the middle of that slow process, it seems like nothing is changing. In these moments when we might be tempted to give up, it is important to remember that part of the change is in us. As we are advocating for justice, we are shaping our hearts to be more like Christ's heart. As we care for the ones that Christ cares for, our hearts become more like Christ's heart.

To put some flesh on this, please allow me to share my experience with this from this past Monday. On Monday morning, Kristin and I participated in the "Remember the Children Walk" in Rapid City. The whole purpose of the event was to remember their names. This began by saying their names, ages, and family connections. It was so we would remember.

It was so that we would remember the child and the great injustice that had happened to them. These were children who died at the Indian Boarding Schools and then were buried in unmarked graves. Families were routinely not notified. This picture is one of the Lakota boys at the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. Some of the names read were children who died at this school, children whose remains were brought back to the memorial site in Rapid City many years later. As each name was read, someone took the placard with that child's information on it. Sometimes it was someone with a family connection, sometimes it was someone with a tribal connection, sometimes it was a stranger who carried that child's name and memory.



While some of these schools remained open a little longer, the school in Rapid City closed in 1933. The purpose of these schools was to strip the children of their culture, their identity, their language, their everything. It would be easy to dismiss this as a black spot in our collective history, to feel sorrow over this injustice that happened to these indigenous children many years ago – almost 100 years now – and to let it end there. And even though I certainly felt the weight of the moment on Monday morning as we walked to the memorial and as several people spoke about the lasting impact of this injustice, the true power of the moment came later in the day as I reflected on the walk and on the injustices done to our native brothers and sisters, one of whom I know personally.

Several years ago, I was taking a class in Illinois as part of the Native American Course of Study. I took about one-third of the twenty required classes in this program. While there, we went to an Indian Boarding School that had been made into a museum. One of the members of my class, Norman, had been sent to a boarding school as a young Navajo boy.

As we walked around the former school, I could see Norman reliving those days and feeling those memories from long ago. I could sense his sorrow and pain when I was able to see his face or to look into his eyes. Later he would share that it felt like he was right back there at his old boarding school, as a young boy being robbed of who he was. The scars from that experience, even though well over 50 years old at that point, were made fresh as Norman walked those grounds. By standing next to a man as he relived that past, I could feel the injustice in a way that I never could by simply visiting the museum myself. In this way, the injustice became a bit personal for me. While I do not know where God might lead me with all of this, I do know that I am more aware of this injustice now and that, again, awareness is step one in the battle for a more just society and world.

To connect back to today's scripture and its application for our lives, I believe that this new awareness is shaping my heart to be more like Christ's heart. And as I am moved to care more for the ones that Christ cares for, my heart becomes more like Christ's heart. In the process, my faith becomes more whole and my resolve to walk a more persistent faith grows. As the faithful become aware of and make the choice to engage in the fight against injustices and other wrongs on our society, our faith as a whole becomes stronger, more powerful, and more persistent, to use the word in today's parable.

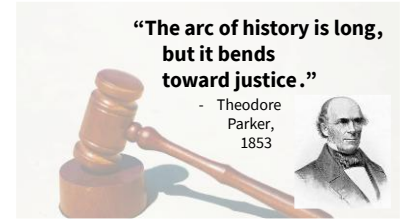


In another fight against injustice, one that began to take place roughly 75 years ago, a leader in that movement uttered this famous quote in 1958: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." Many of you might be familiar with this quote. I learned something new this week about this famous quote. Martin Luther King, Junior, adapted this quote from another quote made roughly 100 years prior – by another man involved in another fight against injustice.

In 1853, it was abolitionist minister Theodore Parker that said this:

“The arc of history is long, but it bends toward justice.” Parker was speaking about having persistent faith in the long battle against slavery. Our collective history and our faith, my friends, bends

towards justice because we follow a God who is a God of justice. As God’s people, may we increasingly become people who are seekers of and advocates for justice. May it be so for you and for me. Alleluia and amen.



GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. When the Son of Man looks down on your life, where does Jesus see your faith being lived out? How might knowing Jesus’ expectations lead to faith growth in you?
- 2) *Pray*. Pondering the injustices in our society and in our world, where might God be calling you to be engaged, involved? Seek discernment in prayer this week.
- 3) *Study*. Re-read Luke 17:26-37 again this week. This time reflect on these words of Jesus in light of his question in today’s reading found in Luke 18:8. What do you learn?