

# The Widow and the Unjust Judge

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**Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church**

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The Gospel reading for today points back to the preceding chapter of Luke. In that chapter, the Pharisees had asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come. Jesus reminded them of two Old Testament events when God acted in judgement. His first example was period before the Great Flood, and the other was the destruction of the city of Sodom. In both cases, Jesus said people were going about their lives like any other day when destruction rained down on them.

The faithful people of God, Noah and his family and Lot and his family, in those stories were saved by their faith. God rendered justice on the wicked, unfaithful people. Jesus knew what was coming for Him – He would be arrested, unfairly charged with the crime of blasphemy, beaten, found guilty of this trumped-up charge and executed. Justice would not be served. But God's plan for salvation would be fulfilled for us and all people.

He also knew that He would be vindicated for suffering these things when God raised Him from the grave and seated Him at His right hand. We confess that from this favored place, Jesus will come to be a judge of the living and the dead at the end of time. The one who was unfairly judged would be the one who is THE JUDGE. All this leads to a story.

A woman died and arrived at the Gates of Heaven. While she was waiting for Saint Peter to greet her, she peeked through the gates. She saw a beautiful table. Sitting at the table were her parents and all the other people she had lived and who had died before her. When Saint Peter came by, the woman said to him, "This is such a wonderful place! How do I get in?" St. Peter answered, "You have to

spell a word correctly.” She asked anxiously, “What word?” St. Peter answered, “The word ‘Love’” The woman proceeded to spell the word “Love,” and Saint Peter invited her into Heaven.

One day, about a year later, Saint Peter came to the woman and asked her to watch the Gates of Heaven for him. While the woman was guarding the Gates of Heaven, her husband arrived. “I’m surprised to see you,” the woman said. “How have you been?” Her husband answered, “Oh, I’ve been doing pretty well since you died. I married the beautiful young nurse that took care of you while you were ill and dying. And, then, I won the multi-state lottery. I sold that little house you and I lived in and bought a mega-mansion. And my new wife and I traveled all around the world. We were on vacation in Cancun, and I went waterskiing today. I fell and hit my head on a rock, and here I am. What a bummer! We were having such a good time! How do I get in here?”

The woman thought for a moment and said, “You have to spell a word.” The man answered, “Which word?” The woman answered back, “Kyrgyzstan.”

Please note this story is not accurate doctrinally. But, I think you see the point. The one who was judged becomes the judge. The one who may have struggled is now the one who has the power. That was the case with Jesus. In many ways, that was the situation with the widow in the parable.

A widow comes to an unjust judge for justice. We are not told who had persecuted her or why. In Jesus’ time in the First Century, life for widows was difficult. They often were at the bottom of the social and economic community. Being the lowest, they were the least powerful people in their society. In Jesus story, it was likely that someone was trying to cheat this widow out of money or land or a house that her husband had left her. In the society of that day, a woman did not go to court. She was poor. She had no means to pay a

bribe. She faced a terrible judge. She had no social leverage. Her situation was hopeless. Her only hope was to be persistent.

The situation that Jesus described was made worse by the judge in this case. He was unjust. He was a man of this world. He is not moved by the fear of God or by compassion for his fellowman. Contrary to Mosaic Law, he didn't care about the plight of this widow.

In his book, *Be Courageous*, Pastor Warren Weirsbe described the context of the court in this way, "The courtroom was not a fine building but a tent that moved from place to place as the judge covered his circuit. The judge, not the law set the agenda. He was surrounded by his assistants. Anybody could watch the proceedings from the outside, but only those who were approved and accepted could have their case tried. This usually meant bribing one of the assistants so that he would call the judge's attention to the case. This is still true in many places around the world" (*Be Courageous*, Victor Books 1989, p. 62).

The widow could remind him that God threatened to punish judges who perverted justice, citing Exodus 22:22 "Do not take advantage of the widow and orphan" "If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry....my anger will be aroused." But the judge did not fear God.

Could the widow argue that the people of the town would despise the judge for not helping her? No. For the judge "neither feared God nor cared about men." He was indifferent to human opinions about him. Her only hope was to be persistent.

Jesus did not tell us if the widow's persistence extended beyond the court. Did she confront this judge outside the court? Did she plead with him in front of his friends and colleagues? Did she confront him in the street or in the marketplace? Jesus doesn't say. We can

assume that she was persistent at the open-air tent where court was being held.

Did you notice that Jesus didn't tell us the widow sat at home wringing her hands about her problems? Jesus didn't say she fretted and complained to her neighbors. Jesus told us she consistently approached the only person who could help her.

An American-Christian motivational speaker, William Arthur Ward, wrote this about worry: "Worry is faith in the negative, belief in defeat, for worry is wasting today's time to clutter up tomorrow's opportunities. Worry is like rocking in a rocking chair. It gives you something to do, but you never get anywhere with it."

When the Apostle Paul was stuck in a Roman dungeon in chains, he wrote to the Christians in Philippi: "Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worry into prayers of thanksgiving. Present your requests to God. Don't be anxious...and the peace of God will guard your hearts" (Phil. 4:6-7).

So, if you look at the situation with the widow, the least powerful person, the widow, became the powerful one and moved the one who seemed to be the most powerful one. Notice, the judge relents but not before reiterating his lack of fear of God and lack of respect for other humans. He says the widow is "beating him down." The Greek word that St. Luke used was "hupopiazō." In Greek, it was often used to describe boxer who was unrelenting in their blows against their opponent so that they "beat them down," or wore them out. The unjust judge finally relented because of persistence of the widow was threatening him. It is giving him a black eye in the community and causing him embarrassment and shame.

Jesus pointedly says, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says." Then, Jesus, compares God and judge. He points out that if an unrighteous, unjust and uncaring judge will act due to persistence pleas, how much more likely will God our Father hear us and grant us justice. He

adds, not only will our Father respond to our pleas, He will do so quickly, unlike the unrighteous judge who was reluctant to act.

We live in a world where we are attacked by an adversary just like the widow. That adversary is Satan. He causes violence around us. He creates havoc in our economic and social systems. He causes diseases and illness in our bodies. He creates doubt about our God and His promises to us, especially the promise to be with us and protect us. The widow in the parable had a case against her adversary. We do not. We have ourselves to blame because of the sin of our lives which contributes to the chaos around us. We are our worst enemy next to Satan. But God has mercy on us. The same Jesus who was telling this parable in which He urged His disciples to trust in God and have faith died for us. Now, we have a standing in the court with God. We can come to seek relieve from our adversary. Now, because of Jesus, we have a relationship with our God who cares deeply about us. Like any loving-and-caring Father, He wants to hear from us. He wants to hear our pleas to Him so He can answer us and grant us righteousness. If we are silent and do not offer our pleas to God, what basis does He have to act?

In his book, *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that every word of prayer must penetrate to the depth of the heart that can only be reached by iteration." Such passion in prayer is shown in the example of the widow in our parable today and in the prayer of Jesus in His Passion in the Garden of Gethsemane before He died for us.

In verse 1 of this reading, St. Luke began by telling us that in this parable Jesus meant to show Jesus' disciples "that they should always pray and not give up." St. Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica, "pray without ceasing." Jesus taught us to pray in His prayer. He also said in Matthew 21:22, "And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

That brings us to the last words of Jesus in this reading. Prayer is an act of faith. Pray is also a test of faith. Absent faith that our God will

answer our prayers, we might just as well as talk to our dog or our car. Neither of them will respond. But if we pray in faith, our God has promised to respond. Prayer is faithfulness to God.

Jesus returned to the question about the end of time. He asked a rhetorical question about that time. He asked, "When the Son of Man comes (at the end of time) will he find faith on earth?" In his earlier examples from the Old Testament there were very few people who demonstrated faith in God before judgement. Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives were the only people of faith in that wicked time. Eight people. And in the story of the destruction of the City of Sodom, only Lot and his two daughters survived. Three people. Only these were faithful and trusted in God, and God was merciful and saved them.

We are God's people of faith. God is looking for our prayers to Him in faith. He is anxious to answer our prayers. He has taught us that His will be done, not ours. Nevertheless, He will answer our prayers.

I know some of you are Prayer Warriors. Some of you have a list of people and things you pray for every day. Continue, in faith, to do so because you know that God does answer prayers. Some of you may pray only occasionally or only here at church. I encourage you to make a list of people, including yourselves and your family, and things which you will pray for on a daily basis.

Persistence in prayer was the point of Jesus parable. Faith in God's promise to hear and answer prayer is what Jesus implied at the end of the reading. Despite what may happen in this wicked world around us, our God is faithful, merciful, and just in dealing with us. He loves us and has shown His love to us through Jesus. Through Jesus, our prayers are heard, and they are answered.

A little over 6 years ago on September 4, 2016, a woman of Albanian descent who was born in Skopje, Macedonia, was beatified as a saint by Pope Francis of the Roman Catholic Church. You know her as

Mother Teresa, and you probably know that for most of her adult life, she worked tirelessly among the poorest of the poor in Calcutta, India. She made numerous trips to raise awareness and money for her cause of mercy and care. There is a story about one of those trips to New York City in which she was to meet with the president and vice-president of very large company. But, even before she arrived, the two executives met together privately and agreed to deny her request for money. Eventually, the diminutive Mother Teresa arrived, and was seated in an executive office across a very large desk from the two men. They listened to her plea but then said, "We appreciate what you do among the poor and downtrodden, but we just cannot commit any funds to you at this time." Mother Teresa said, "Let's pray." In her prayer she asked God to soften the hearts of the two executives. After saying "Amen," she asked them, again, for the money. And, once again, they answered that they weren't going to commit any money to her. Immediately, Mother Teresa said, "Let's pray." But before she could say a word in prayer, the executives relented, called their CFO and told him to bring his checkbook.

In answer to Jesus' question, "when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?" Will he find faith that is persistent and loyal? And the answer implied in the question is: yes, He will! He will find people like those mentioned throughout the Bible who prayed without ceasing. He will find faith in people like the tax-collector who humbled himself and beat his chest imploring God for mercy. He will find faith in people who, just as little children who look to their earthly father, look to their heavenly Father through Jesus Christ and trust him implicitly. He will find faith in people like the blind beggar and the 10 lepers, who cried out to Christ for healing and mercy. He will find faith in people like you and me. For we too are a people who stand before God imploring Him for mercy and leaning on him for everlasting hope in the name of Jesus Christ.

So can we pray and not lose heart? Yes! Can we pray and not give up? Absolutely! For we know to whom we belong. St. Peter wrote,

“[Cast] all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

He cares for you, and unlike the judge in today’s parable; God wants to hear from you. You are His beloved child. So pray to Him continually and do not lose heart.

Now, like Mother Teresa, let us pray. Father in heaven, having heard and meditated on the words of Jesus to be persistent in prayer, grant us the strength, the will and the faith to call upon You with heartfelt and persistent prayers daily. With the Psalmist we pray, “I call on you because you will answer me; turn your ear to me and hear my prayer. Show me the wonders of Your great love.” And, grant us the patience to wait for Your answers to our prayers, the wisdom to see them and the faith to accept them as Your will. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Now, I pray, that the peace that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.