

Luke 18:1-8

“And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

Jesus contrasts the persistent widow with the un-just judge. The widow represents the person who constantly prays, expecting God to answer. The unjust judge does not represent God. No, despite how it sounds, his character does not portray God. God is not unjust. We may not receive what we want when we pray, but God is always just. We need to pray until we receive an answer or until God calms our desire. Sometimes God calms the storm, sometimes God calms the child.

When I worked for Hamot Medical Center I would always get to work early, I was often the first person in the office. Because I was early, I would often run into the custodians, a husband and wife team, in the lobby and we would chat a little. They knew I was going back to college to get my undergraduate degree. Once when I was struggling with a class, I complained about how difficult it was. The woman replied, “Anything worth having is worth struggling for.” She gave me the encouragement I needed to persevere and pass the class with a high grade. That took commitment.

But that is nothing when compared to the achievement of Glen Cunningham who ran for America in the 1932 and 1936 Olympics. His greatest achievement had nothing to do with the Olympic races, but it was in running. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica Cunningham ran the mile in 4:06.7, that’s 4 minutes, and 6.7 seconds, a world record that he held for three years. Elite runners today still run about a 4 to 5 minute mile, with the fastest now at just a little under 4 minutes. So, it may not sound like a huge accomplishment, that is until you hear the back story.

As an elementary school boy, Glen and his brother Floyd were in charge of building the fire in the pot-belly stove at the country school they attended. One day the stove exploded, killing his brother and severely burning Glen from the waist down. At first they thought Glen was also going to lose his life, however later it was determined he would live but would never walk.

He spent months either in a wheelchair or in his bed. Then he decided he was going to walk. With his wheelchair outside he crawled out of it and drug himself across the backyard to the picket fence. He pulled himself up and worked his way down the fence row. Each day, month after month, he persevered with his routine until he could finally walk again. Then he learned to run. In college he joined the track team. It was while running in Madison Square Garden that he set the world record for the mile run.

Glen Cunningham understood the way prayer and perseverance (or commitment) worked together. He gave God praise for answering his prayers for courage and strength to get out of his chair and walk, and to finally run faster than anyone else. Pray as though everything depends on God and work as though everything depends on you. To succeed you need to pray and persevere.

The woman in today’s parable from Luke does not have a cheerleader like I had to encourage me to get through that difficult college class. She feels strongly enough about her case that, like Glen Cunningham, she perseveres on her own. From what I have read in commentaries, the woman had the right to win the case, but the judge was corrupt, normally only granting the settlement when he is bought off, no matter the situation. However, since this woman persisted, since she constantly begged him, he agrees to grant her her wish simply to get her out of his hair. Jesus says if this judge will change his mind, won’t God give us what is just?

What is just. What is needed. What is beneficial in the long term. Not always exactly what we want. In my humble opinion this is why Jesus asks the question, "And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Why ask for something if there is the chance that you won't receive it? Why continue to have faith in God when your prayers are not answered the way you want them to be? Why persistently pray? Why persist in prayer when we might not get what we want anyway? Because God answers prayer in three ways. God's answers are "Yes" "No" and "Not now". The "Yes" answer is obvious, even when we sometimes overlook that God has answered our prayer and we forget to give thanks, we know God has answered yes.

Often, even though what we want seems to be the best for us God sees that it isn't and answers, "No". When the answer is "No" God will give us insight as to why we can't have what we want. But that insight may not come immediately. We may have to wait years to understand. So we are to persist in prayer. Which brings us to the third answer, "Not now." It could be that we simply are not ready for what we are asking God to give us and prolonging the wait will prepare us for what we are to receive. We are to persist in prayer.

Persisting in prayer keeps us in relationship with God. But sometimes people have what they see as such terrible things happen in their lives that they aren't able to see God at work in their lives. This past summer at one of the NASCAR races we went to one of my brother's friends, Kevin, told me he was angry with God for what has happened in his life.

Years ago he was in a terrible auto accident that left him paralyzed from the waist down. On top of this his wife was diagnosed with a type of Muscular Dystrophy that has left her debilitated. Kevin is amazingly able to get around with a scooter and crutches but can't understand why God would have allowed something like this to happen to him and then to his wife as well. He has abandoned God.

So many people have left God behind because they can't understand why God would allow bad things to happen to good people. I can try to explain, saying that it's because people have free will and can do what they want no matter who gets hurt, but to tell you the truth, I don't understand the reason why either. I just know that God doesn't desert us when we go through horrible things that we don't understand. I just know that God stands beside us and experiences our pain along with us, and that we always have God with us no matter what. But that isn't enough for people who are trying to get through their difficulties all by themselves, leaving God in the dust. When their prayers aren't answered the way they expect they lose faith that God even exists. And so Jesus asked, "And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

I want the answer to be a resounding "YES!" Because we, like the woman who continually pestered the judge, are persistent in prayer. We have allowed our prayers to build a relationship with God. We understand that even when things aren't the way we would like them to be that God has a plan and through God's grace shown to us in Jesus the Christ we can be a part of his kingdom if we so choose. Prayer that God will give us the strength and courage we need, persistence so that we continually strive to do what needs to be done to accomplish the task at hand. Sometimes, like Jacob in our first reading, we end up injured from our struggle with God. But like Jacob we remain steadfast in the faith, and like Paul we share the good news that Jesus has brought redemption from sin and we receive everlasting life.

All glory be to God.

