

October 19, 2025

Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost

“Praying for Justice”

Luke 18:1-8

(Read the parable)

There is a meaning of this parable that is pretty easy to understand, that is: if this lousy judge who neither fears God or respects man will cave into the woman who constantly calls on him, how much more will our God of steadfast love and mercy come through for His people who continually call on His name in prayer. That point is relatively plain.

The part that seems to be muddled, maybe because we want to muddle it, is on which prayer is God going to come through. The woman in the parable, who represent us, the people doing the praying, asks for justice against her adversary and the explanation at the end talks of justice being given by God. But what is this justice?

As per our usual practice our first instinct is to try and make this justice something about this life; about us somehow getting blessings and rewards in the here and now maybe for following our Savior, denying ourselves and walking in faith and love. The very last sermon I watched by Joel Osteen was him trying to twist this parable into being about earthly blessings, earthly justice of some sort. But that thinking just doesn't fly here. First off, we don't always walk a stellar walk of faith so I'm not so sure any of us really wants justice for that. I've often said the last thing we want is a God who gives us what we truly deserve.

But the framing of the parable also makes clear Jesus isn't talking about this life. *“He told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.”* Well, you're not going to lose heart if God is pouring all the blessings you're praying for on you all over the place. You lose heart because of the continual struggle; ongoing prayers and not seeming to see any result. And at the end Jesus says, *“Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”* There is your clue about the justice arriving—it's Jesus, sovereign Christ arriving on earth for...judgment—the meting out of justice! It is the judge who gives justice. So this parable is saying that we keep on praying and do not lose heart as we await the final answer to all our prayers—the completion of God's plan of our salvation in the Second Coming, the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting. I think that is a very solid take on this parable.

And yet, not so fast. Back in Luke 9 Jesus set His face like flint toward Jerusalem. He is on His way to the cross as He teaches this parable. At the end of the next chapter He is entering the city on Palm Sunday. And what is going to happen the Friday following? Justice. Punishment will be meted out on our adversary—the sin that condemns us—in Christ's crucified flesh justice is done for all those offenses. So in this understanding the justice is coming pretty quickly, and this justice is fully completed—not a single sin will be left unatoned for.

And following that, what is a constant feature of the faithful prayers of God's people? *“For the sake of Christ's suffering and death, please forgive me my sins.”* How often do God's people pray this way? Without ceasing, I'd hope. We daily sin much and thus daily need forgiveness much. And what is the answer to this faithful prayer? Justice! Your sins are forgiven. You stand “justified,” declared “not guilty” before God for the sake of Christ by grace, through faith.

So in understanding this parable I think we can joyfully see the “both/and” of our Christian existence; God's justice is a wonderful both now and later blessing. We do not lose heart because though Satan may try to burden our consciences with the damning accusation of

our many sins, Christ's justice is continually forgiving us, declaring us "not guilty" and reconciling us with God. In that, we are further assured of the pending reality of bliss forever in His glory.

So Jesus is speaking Gospel good news of salvation to His elect. Do not lose heart. God will and God does give wonderful justice to His beloved children.

However, you also can't get away from the warning of Jesus Christ here to not allow this wonderful blessing to slip away. *"He told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray..."* *"And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night?"* Prayer is a vital component of right Christian faith. God invites us to pray "so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father." His Word exhorts and commands prayer. Prayer is not optional for the Christian.

And please don't take this as a point of law Jesus is laying down so you better pray to avoid punishment. No, prayer is simply a living out of right faith. In faith we love the God of our salvation. Love seeks relationship, communication. Prayer is simply an intimate way of living out faith.

What do we call it when a child cuts all ties with parents and shuts them out of his or her life? We call it a tragedy! A relationship designed to be beautiful and loving stands trashed! How much more tragic is it if the God of love who sacrificed His holy Son in order to be reconciled and restored to His wayward child is then shut out by that child? Especially because through Christ all this God wishes to do is bless us with the greatest and eternal gifts!

You cannot possibly miss the connection Christ Himself makes here. He tells a parable specifically aimed at exhorting continual prayer and then punctuates it with the final question, *"Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"* That faith is very much tied to the prayers of God's faithful people. If Jesus comes back in glory and finds a world of people not practicing prayer, what's the implication? Yeah, it's pretty clear.

I know some people sitting here today may be rather disturbed by this message because their practice of prayer stinks. I know. Been there, done that. But this text is Christ's own invitation and exhortation to change that and draw closer to His grace in prayerful conversation.

You have no excuse not to pray and you know it. You're not too busy. Tell me how much time you spend staring at a screen each day and then try and tell me you're too busy for prayer. That don't fly.

I think a main reason folks avoid prayer is shame. When you've offended and done someone wrong over and over and over, you're not keen on meeting up with them and facing the music. And when you go before God in faithful prayer, all your clever rationalization and excuses fall apart before Holy God. To rightly pray is to allow yourself to be stripped bare and all your sins and your powerlessness to do anything good stands exposed in His light. You can feel not only dirty and soiled, but also like an idiot for stubbornly and stupidly wandering outside of His good and perfect will for you. It's not comfortable, so I think sinners often shamefully avoid it out of fear of judgment.

But judgment, the justice of Christ, is what we first seek in prayer! We acknowledge God is right, righteous, glorious, holy...and merciful. We plead forgiveness for the sake of Christ and we receive it. Done. All the shame is taken away. We are holy child speaking with holy Father, pouring out our heart, our struggles, our desires, and yes, even our shame, knowing that He now has nothing except love and acceptance for us, because that is His promise in Christ.

So pray. If you've got some reason or emotion that makes you avoid prayer, it's lame. Get over it. If you struggle in prayer, pray the one Jesus gave us. Pray the Lord's Prayer and ponder

and flush out each petition. Grab a Luther's Small Catechism and pray about every element therein that applies to you—that should cover you until 2027. Grab a hymnal and pray the verses of the hymns; they're pure gold. There are even apps for prayer to put on your smartphone now.

If you still struggle, talk to me. Talk to a Christian you think has a better handle on prayer. Talk to God. Yes, pray to Him regarding your lousy practice of prayer. He can help. He gives the Holy Spirit! Do not be content with a lack of prayer. Jesus has made clear today prayer is integral to the faith.

When you ponder prayer, don't fear it. Remember the simplest meaning that comes through in this story: if this lousy judge who neither fears God nor respects man will cave into the woman who constantly calls on him, how much more will our God of steadfast love and mercy come through for His people who continually call on His name in prayer.

Just pray: pray for God to come through with grace, with His wonderful justice, for you. He promises He will.

Amen.