

Proper 13 (18) 11th Sunday after Pentecost - August 4, 2024

Ruth 1:15–22; Psalm 44:1–4, 8, 17, 23–26; Acts 6:1–6; Luke 18:1–8

### “Praying”

1. I love to sing, but I can’t sight read music to save my life.
  - a. Give me the sheet music for a new song, and I may be able to get close to the tune, but really not close enough.
  - b. I’ll have to pluck out the notes one at a time on the piano – and by the way I also don’t know how to play the piano!
  - c. But I love to sing! And I’ve been in choirs since I was a little boy. So how does that happen?
    - i. Well, what I can’t accomplish with musical knowledge and technical talent, I make up for it with hustle.
    - ii. Knowing God had given me a good voice and a good ear, and a desire to sing, what made it possible for me to do it was listening, copying and memorizing, studying HARD, and paying very close attention to the conductor.
    - iii. I had the great pleasure of singing with my college A Capella choir and then the alumni choir, and we toured in the US, Mexico and Europe.
    - iv. I auditioned and got into the Indianapolis Opera Chorus and sang with them in 19 productions over nearly 10 years.
    - v. It was a thrill of a lifetime to be on stage with amazing professionals and singing operas by Puccini, Bizet, and Verdi.
    - vi. There I was singing in the Opera chorus next to chorus members with master’s Degrees in Vocal Performance from Jacob’s School of Music (like Jenny! I sang next to Jenny in Indianapolis!)
    - vii. It was my persistence and stubbornness, combined with my delight in singing with a great bunch of folks, that made those unforgettable memories possible.
2. In today’s gospel parable, Jesus presents us with an odd example for what prayer looks like and an unlikely role model for how to pray with persistence.
  - a. The parable is probably a story line which sounded familiar to the audience.
    - i. A person without power is being taken advantage of, and a corrupt judge refuses to make things right.
    - ii. So, what else is new? How often had they all been there before?
      1. Maybe they or someone they knew had that happened to them.
      2. They couldn’t recruit someone with power to speak on their behalf, and couldn’t scrape up enough money to bribe the judge.
      3. There was no hope for a helpful or just resolution.
    - iii. In this story it is a widow who is in this problematic and vulnerable situation.
      1. We don’t get many details, only enough to realize that maybe the widow didn’t have the support system to advocate for her, and didn’t have the money for a bribe.
      2. Usually that story would not have ended well for the widow, who would have remained vulnerable to whoever was taking advantage of

her, and would have been forced to endure injustice alone in bitterness and silence.

3. But, this widow had agency, determination, and she was fearless.
  4. What she didn't have in terms of power and influence she made up with hustle and persistence.
  5. I can just hear her yelling at the judge outside the judge's window:
    - a. "I've got nothing but time, sonny, so I'll be here day and night making a ruckus until you do your job, until you get me justice."
    - b. And she backed it up.
    - c. She was there ALL. THE. TIME., making a scene, drawing attention to her plight, shaming the shameless judge, being basically a thorn in his side.
    - d. Until he acted. But it is a surprising action.
    - e. The judge could have had the widow removed, or punished.
    - f. But instead, to get her out of his hair, the judge who couldn't care less about her, finds a way to give her what she wanted, just to make her go away.
- b. Jesus, in trying to teach his disciples how to pray, wanted them to consider what praying continually could look like, without getting discouraged.
- i. He wanted them to have a persistence about their prayer life.
  - ii. In the parable Jesus makes the case that if a shameless judge will listen, how much more so will God listen!
  - iii. But we have to be careful not to think that prayer is about badgering God into submission.
    1. That's not what the story is about.
    2. God is also not a vending machine for human wishes.
    3. God is not trying to ignore us.
    4. God is all too willing to hear and respond to our requests for justice and wellbeing.
  - iv. For Jesus, it was about getting on the same page with God
    1. Not our page. God's page.
    2. Meaning, trying constantly to align ourselves to what God desires for us, to the justice of God's reign
    3. The persistence, then, may be as much about a constant desire to make ourselves heard, and also an ongoing attempt to understand how God is responding, with a faith that seeks to trust God's will for us
3. You and I don't really have to be good at praying.
- a. We are called to have a willingness to really seek what God is all about.
  - b. To trust that God is ready to hear us
  - c. And to be so persistent that even our less-than-perfect prayers will ultimately align with what God desires for our life.

**Sources:**

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-29-3/commentary-on-luke-181-8-3>

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-29-3/commentary-on-luke-181-8-5>