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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
September 6, 2015
15th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: 1Kings 17:1-16; James 5:13-18
Hymns: 456; 459; 457; 644 (798:1,4)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Luke 18:1-8

Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, 2 saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. 3 Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.' 4 And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, 5 yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.'"

6 Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. 7 And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? 8 I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God my Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Prayer

Prayer is an important ingredient in the Christian's life. However the concept of prayer is not limited to Christianity; it is seen within

virtually every recognized religion in the world. Psychologists have done studies among the sick and have found that those who pray do much better than those who do not pray. The stunning part and perhaps disturbing part of this study for many Christians is that they didn't see any statistically significant difference between religions.

Some would draw the conclusion that this verifies that all religions are praying to the same god and simply using different names, and a variety of evidently legitimate approaches to that divine force that controls the universe. The devil would use this false conclusion to undermine our faith in the one true God. What this study demonstrates is that the human mind, a wondrous creation of God, can benefit from a calming meditative practice, and that indeed this may prove beneficial to one's entire being and enhance medical treatment. This is **not** the power or the promise of prayer which brings us to our knees in devout worship.

When we pray we are looking for true divine intervention and deliverance. We are sharing with God the thoughts and burdens of our hearts, and seeking His aid and assistance. Often we are of the mindset that we should be able to define the Lord's answer. We may think God should operate on our timetable according to our plan for life. It doesn't work that way, and so because of the weakness of our flesh we may become discouraged in our prayer life, and conclude that the Lord doesn't have an answer for us, or that the Lord isn't responding to our troubling situation.

Time and again Jesus addressed the importance of prayer in our relationship with God, as did also the apostles and prophets. Our text this morning is but one example of Jesus' encouragement for people to "**pray and not lose heart**" (Luke 18:1). In this parable of the widow and the unjust judge Jesus presents us with --

THEME: A Lesson in Persistent Prayer.

Let us start with understanding --

I. Our Similarity to the Widow.

Why did Jesus select a widow as the subject of this parable about prayer? The position of a widow in society at that time was one of

great vulnerability. A widow, a woman without a man to give her standing in the community, was easy prey for those who would take advantage of her situation and seek to defraud her of her livelihood or her late husband's income. This parable is really directed to all of Christendom in these last days of the earth. Jesus knows that our position in this world is also one of great vulnerability. The Lord has placed here for a reason, and yet He is well aware of the hostility of the world against His children and how we are vulnerable to their attacks as we follow Him. The world sees us as an easy target for their abuse, for aren't we always to turn the other cheek, and not seek vengeance? Aren't we instructed to forgive our debtors?

In the parable the widow turned to the local judge, the one who was to maintain justice in her community. She turned to him with the hopes that he would give her justice and relieve her of the oppression her adversaries. She was no match for them. She couldn't deliver herself. This judge was her only recourse. However, this judge was not a good man; he didn't fear God, and he didn't care what other people thought about him. That didn't stop the widow from turning to him for the necessary relief. She was determined, and would not be ignored. She wore this unjust judge down with her persistent pleas for deliverance from her enemies.

Ultimately, he answered her it because she got to him when previously others hadn't. The literal expression in the Greek is that he feared that she would give him a black eye, not literally but figuratively, in the same way we would use that expression. She was making him look bad so that people would finally take notice of just how lousy a judge he really was. Besides that, she was wearying him. She plain and simple wore him down with her persistence.

That is key in our comparison to this widow. She was both bold and persistent in taking her petitions to the unjust judge. It paid off. She received the necessary response and was delivered from her adversaries. This lesson is important for us in our prayer life in directing our petitions to the Lord, who is the righteous judge! Jesus is teaching us that if this persistence was the right course of action for the widow with the unjust judge, shouldn't we be

encouraged to persistently come before the judge who cares for us and upholds justice on earth! Jesus would have us approach him with both boldness and confidence and persistence. We “**always ought to pray and not lose heart**” (Luke 18:1)! Consider these familiar words of the Lord about prayer:

Luke 11:5-10 And He said to them, “Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves; 6 for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; 7 and he will answer from within and say, ‘Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you’? 8 I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.9 “So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

The Lord is clear in this passage; we are not to think that we have prayed enough when we call upon His name once in our time of need. He would have us call upon His name again and again, just as we would pester a close and dear friend until we received the necessary help. After all Jesus is our best and dearest Friend! He wants us to keep on asking Him when our heart is troubled, or we are oppressed. Continue looking to Him for help and we will find it. Don’t stop knocking on his door until you know He has delivered you.

Some might think that we shouldn’t be so bold, but that is exactly what the Lord desires of us in our relationship with Him, We read in --

Hebrews 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

We should grow in this grace as we make --

II. Our Appeal to the Judge.

You see some mistakenly perceive God as being similar to this unjust judge. They don’t think God is really capable of caring for

everyone in this world. They see the mayhem that impacts so many people, and all that pain and suffering, and they lay the responsibility for all this on the Lord. Sometimes even Christians are tempted to doubt the Lord's attentiveness to their needs. We are pretty sure we know how our lives ought to go, and so when things don't line up the way we envision things, we doubt that God is paying attention to our needs.

The truth is: God knows far better than we do what we need. The truth is: God knows that our best interest in life is spiritual and He will attend to us in all our ways so that we end up with Him in heaven. The truth is: God cares so much about us that He sacrificed His Son to deliver us from sin and death. That clearly demonstrates for us the depth of His love and concern for us. This is the foundation of our confidence when we make our appeals to the Lord as our righteous judge. Recall the words of –

Romans 8:32 “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”

God is the righteous judge. He shall not deny you anything you truly need for life and salvation. He cares for you! He cares for you so much that He sent His Son into this world; He sent Jesus to the cross to save our souls! There could be no clearer testimony to the extent of how much He cares. In His loving care for us He doesn't simply dictate what shall be without giving us the opportunity for input. He encourages us to come to Him with all our concerns for life. He encourages us to “**cast all our cares upon Him, for He cares for us**” (1 Peter 5:7)! And the Lord has promised that He will be responsive, indeed responsive beyond our expectations. The Lord promised through the Prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 65:24 “It shall come to pass That before they call, I will answer; And while they are still speaking, I will hear.

He **is** attentive to us and to our prayers. He **is** attentive to our every need, and prompt in giving us aid, just at the right time.

So even as the opening words of our text gave direction to our meditation that it was Jesus' purpose for the parable that “**men**

always ought to pray and not lose heart' (Luke 18:1), so near the conclusion of His exhortation Jesus directs our prayers to our greatest need. Let us consider –

III. Prayer in these Last Days.

Luke 18:6-8 “Then the Lord said, ‘Hear what the unjust judge said. 7 And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? 8 I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?’”

Again we recall the point of comparison to the widow and how she was being oppressed. The oppression which concerns the Lord is the spiritual oppression which confronts us in this world as the devil and the world seek to trip us up in our faith, and cause us to stumble. The children of God are oppressed by the evil in this world. It burdens our hearts. This is the cause for us to cry out to the Lord day and night with continual prayer. We should pray for the freedom to worship Him without persecution. We should pray for the strengthening of our faith against the allurements of the world. We should pray that the Lord bless the preaching of His Word and the advancement of His kingdom here on earth. We should pray that the Lord come again and receive us to Himself in heaven.

These concerns which are foremost in the mind and heart of the Lord do not always finds that foremost spot in our prayers. We are both spiritual and also physical being living in this material world. Often the concerns which press upon our hearts most urgently have to do with the trials of this life. The Lord understands and surely the Lord encourages us to bring all these concerns to Him in our prayers with the absolute confidence that He will help us in our time of need. We have already noted the evidence for this in Scripture.

However, we sometimes struggle in our prayers and in our lives because of our weakness, because of our fleshly concerns and desires. James addressed the deficiencies in the Christian life in his epistle, and this includes powerful lessons about common flaws with our prayers.

James 4:2-4 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Many of these failures are in the heart, dealing with covetousness makes us also less than charitable toward others, and all too often our trust and greatest desire is earthly rather than heavenly. The allurements of the treasures and pleasures, and our desire to be friends with the world sets us in opposition to what the Lord would have us doing in our lives. Even when the activity in and of itself is not evil, it often distracts us from our spiritual lives. Yes, we too can ask amiss. We too need to look at our faith and love for Christ, and be sure to bolster our faith with the regular feeding upon the gospel in word and sacrament. Yes, we do live in the last times! And yes, the day of the Lord is near. These are times of trouble when it is as important as it has ever been to keep ourselves and our children founded in the gospel. Then when Jesus comes, He will find faith on the earth!

Faith is the key ingredient in prayer. We began our meditation talking about the world's view of prayer and actually it doesn't take faith into account, not in the true sense of saving faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. God does. While any prayer uttered from the mouth of followers of any religion may stimulate some emotional or even physical benefit, **it does not avail before God**. Prayer that is offered in Jesus' name, with a sure and certain faith that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and that the Almighty God hears our prayers for Jesus' sake, these prayers are powerful. That is the faith Jesus looks to find on earth upon His return. Prayers offered in such faith make a difference in our hearts, in our lives, and in the world around us. James presented that powerful assertion in our epistle lesson: **"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much"** (James 5:16).

Truly, for every child of God Jesus' lesson is clear: **"Men always ought to pray and not lose heart"** (Luke 18:1).

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.