

SERMON – 19/10/25

Luke 18:1-8

Jesus said, “Will the Son of Man find faith on earth when He comes?” (Luke 18:8)

How is your prayer life, I wonder? Are you someone who is regular and methodical in your praying, consciously setting aside time each day to commune with God, talking over with your Creator and Saviour the things that are on your heart and lifting other people and their concerns before the Lord? Or are your prayers more sporadic, fired off as you feel the need in the heat of the moment? Probably somewhere in between, I imagine.

How is your faith, I wonder? Are you someone who regularly sees mountains moved when you pray or do you sometimes wonder if you have enough faith even to ask something of God never mind to expect an answer? I expect most of us are at the lower end of that scale, so join with me this morning in exploring the parable of the persistent widow that we have just read and let's see what God might do in us and through us this week.

As is often the case with Jesus' parables, the story is very sketchy because the details are actually unimportant. We are being asked to think about some big questions rather than getting bogged down in the minutiae.

We have a judge and we have a widow – the widow keeps coming to the judge to plead for justice against her opponent, but for some time she is met with a blunt refusal. The judge, it would seem, just enjoyed his status and did such work as suited him or that lined his pockets. A poor widow couldn't bribe him and he thought she would eventually give up bothering him and go home. But this is where the widow showed herself to be different – she had no other way of solving her problem and because presumably she had a watertight case against her adversary, she had nothing to lose and everything to gain by keeping on at the judge until he relented and took action on her behalf. The point that Jesus makes about the parable is that if a corrupt human judge can take notice of one who was the lowest of the low in his estimation, how much more will God bring about justice for His

chosen ones who cry out to Him day and night? "I tell you, says Jesus, He will judge in their favour and do it quickly."

Now, it might make us squirm a little to find God being likened to the kind of corrupt official we meet here, but it obviously didn't bother Jesus to use such a picture to point us to His heavenly Father. In any case, Jesus wants to show us that God is *different* from this character and that we actually have more to learn here about *ourselves* than about God. The hard question that Jesus puts is this: Will the Son of Man – that is to say Jesus Himself – find faith on earth when He comes? We rejoice to acknowledge that where two or three are gathered in Jesus' name He is there in the midst, but what if His word to us this morning is a blunt question: Where is your faith?

There are three matters in this passage that are worth dwelling on, I think – we'll come back in a moment to the main point of the parable, namely persistence in prayer, but let me also raise another couple of points about how we exercise our faith in prayer.

Firstly there is the issue of the rightness of the widow's cause. The parable tells us that she pleaded with the judge for her 'rights' against her opponent - not retribution or vengeance, but *justice*. She wasn't out to make trouble or to get her own back for the sake of it – whatever had happened, the outcome had not been fair and it was entirely right and good that the matter be sorted out. There could have been no doubt as to the rightness of her cause, because if there had been a chance that her claim would be thrown out of court she never would have persevered in the way she did. She was utterly convinced that she was right in what she was trying to achieve – if she was just trying it on, she would have lost interest and moved on to an easier target.

I wonder whether we could say the same about *our* prayers? Perhaps one of the reasons we don't persevere in prayer about a particular matter is that sometimes we're not totally convinced ourselves that what we are praying for is the right thing. Maybe we have a sense that we would *like* such and such a thing to happen – the sorting out of a problem, perhaps, or the healing of an illness, or the renewal and growth of the church – but if we

are not convinced of the rightness of our case, how persistent are we likely to be when we pray about it? Maybe that should make us stop and think about the things for which we are praying. Maybe our first prayer should be to ask for wisdom about how to pray. Jesus Himself teaches us to pray 'Your Kingdom come, Your will be done...' so how does what we are praying for measure up to that? Perhaps it's *not* right that we go on praying for a particular outcome. Perhaps we have to learn (under God) to live with the consequences of a problem, to live with an illness, to die in peace rather than in bitterness. The question is: What will advance the purposes of God in your life and in the lives of those for whom you are praying?

If you are certain that your cause is right, then let me exhort you to redouble your efforts in prayer. But if you have doubts about the rightness of your cause, then either you need to pray for greater faith, or you have to let go of the thing for which you have been praying and ask for the strength to cope with what you have lost. Just because *you* think there should be a particular outcome doesn't mean to say you are right – that was what Job learned when he finally humbled himself before the throne of God. God sees so much more than we ever can. What is God's will in the matter? What kind of faith will Christ find in us when He comes?

The second thing, in fact, concerns faith. It is what the Son of Man will be looking for when He comes, we are told here, and it's what the widow in the parable exemplifies when she stands up so bravely to the system. She was utterly helpless – she had been denied justice at the whim of the unjust judge, but she believed so passionately that her adversary was wrong and that she had been a victim, that she was prepared to take on the big guns and the vested interests of the day. Ultimately her faith was in a higher Judge; she knew that before God she deserved justice and she *clung* on to that faith as day after day she hammered at the judge's door and demanded her right. Faith is the foundation of prayer – through prayer we can address the most stubborn, protracted cases of worldly vested interests, be it the refusal of two sides to sort out their differences, whether they be individuals or groups or nations or superpowers, and we can take

them to the throne of the One who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or can even imagine. Do you believe in prayer? Do you have faith in the living God? Many seemingly intractable problems – personal, social, local, global – have been the subject of heartfelt, faithful, persistent prayer over the years, and the answers to those prayers are perhaps even more wonderful than those to which an answer comes in a heartbeat. When we bow in prayer, if we can see nothing more than a sea of troubles and problems and obstacles, we will not get terribly far. But if, when we bow in prayer, we can fix our eyes on Jesus, then the matters we are bringing to Him in our prayers already begin to recede in our minds because we have access to the very power of God, and in that context of faith, even the most daunting of troubles can be overcome.

The Judge of all the earth is just, the Bible tells us – and it is that Judge who is the hearer of our prayers. Sometimes it is the *road* travelled in prayer that is more significant than the destination. Will the Son of Man find faith in us when He comes? Does Christ find faith in *our* hearts as He stands among us now?

But, finally, to the nub of this parable, the call that we are given to pray always and not to become discouraged. Easier said than done, of course. But it *can* be done, if we allow prayer to be as natural a part of our lives as conversation, or even as breathing, that is to pray always, to live every moment conscious of the presence of God. If that naturalness of approach becomes a part of our being, it will also become much more natural for us to bring our concerns *persistently* before God – not just when we feel like praying, not just when we remember to pray, but all the time, with every step, with every breath.

The apostle Paul is an inspiring example – his letters give us an astonishing picture of the possibilities there are in the life of prayer. Writing to the Romans Paul says, “God is my witness how *constantly* I remember you in my prayers *at all times*.” To the Ephesians, he writes, “I *keep* asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.” To the Colossians, this: “Since the day we heard about you we have *not stopped* praying for you.” To the church in Thessalonica, these words: “We *constantly* pray for

you." And to Timothy, "I thank God... as *night and day* I *constantly* remember you in my prayers." Jesus calls us in this morning's reading to pray always and not to give up. And Paul also exhorts us to pray. "Be joyful in hope, he writes, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Or again, "Pray in the Spirit on all occasions, he says, with all kinds of prayers and requests." Or in another place: "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful." And in one of the shortest verses in the Bible, he writes: "Pray continually."

Just think of the widow in the parable – certain of the rightness of her cause, believing that her appeal to the judge *must* be fruitful, and refusing to give up hammering at the corrupt man's door until she gets her answer. Are we (am I) like that in our praying? Are we certain that we are praying for the right things, are we full of faith in God's promise to hear our prayers, and are we stubbornly persistent in our knocking at heaven's door or is prayer in reality a very part-time hobby?

We may think it presumptuous to pray like that, in case our actions are considered irritating or annoying. But as we see here, Jesus specifically asks it of us. So let me set you some homework this week, to be persistent in prayer. I suggest you focus on three specific things.

Firstly, take something personal to yourself that is causing you concern – seek God's will in the matter and pray for a solution to the problem in the very near future.

Secondly, pray for something specific in the life of Kinross-shire Parish Church, that God would bring a particular blessing to our fellowship in the coming week.

And thirdly pray for something completely external – it might be another person, it might be an event, it might be a situation of need in the world, it might be our leaders. Let's all batter unashamedly at God's door this week for real and lasting peace in Israel and Palestine and in Ukraine, and let's just see what God will do. I'll be interested to hear any answers you may receive.

Pray always. Never be discouraged. And when Jesus comes, He *will* find faith on the earth.