

Persist!
Luke 18:1-8

Oct. 19, 2025 (Pen. 19-C)

St. Paul's Lutheran, North Freedom

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

"For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'"

And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:1-8, NIV)

In the name of Jesus, our Lord and Savior, dear fellow believers:

"Don't give up! Keep going!" The football coach yells at his players during the game. Even though the odds seem stacked against them, the opposing team is stronger and more skilled, and they're down 20 to 0, the coach urges his team to persist and do their best to win the game.

Our gospel reading for today informs us that Jesus was like that football coach. He "told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up." Though the odds may seem stacked against us, let's learn from Coach Jesus not to give up. Regarding both our prayers and our faith, we need to live by one word: **Persist!**

Consider the widow in Jesus' parable. Widows in Jesus' day had little or no safety net to protect them. An "adversary" took advantage of the widow's precarious situation, claimed her property, drove her to near slavery. The widow took him to court to seek justice. But there she was stonewalled. The judge was one who "neither feared God nor cared what people thought," he didn't care that this widow in front of him was getting robbed because she had no means to pay him, so he refused her case.

And yet, the widow didn't give up. She kept coming back to this judge, day after day, pleading her case—so many times that she wore the judge down. The judge finally said, "All right, all right, I'll do it." He gave in, granted her case a hearing and a favorable verdict so that she wouldn't come back and attack him!

Jesus teaches us, "Listen to what the unjust judge says." Persistence pays off. Consider this: If even an unjust judge brings justice for a persistent widow, wouldn't the holy, just, merciful Lord God answer our prayers, bring justice and help us when we ask? Jesus reminds us also in his words here that we are "his chosen ones." We're not a nameless nobody in the universe in God's eyes; God himself chose us, elected us to belong with him in his kingdom, out of grace. For these reasons we can be confident when we come to God in prayer, for he himself has told us to pray, and he promises to hear us for Jesus' sake.

But do we persist in prayer? How often it happens, whether in a time of crisis or for a general need, we say a quick prayer to God, nothing seems to happen, and then we forget to keep on praying. How easily we give up. Now maybe you're thinking, "I did pray, over and over again, for my mom who got cancer. I kept after God. But she never got better and she eventually died." We also need to remember that God's way of answering our prayers isn't the same as ours. That's why we add as Jesus did in Gethsemane, "Yet not my will, but yours be done" (Lk. 22:42). God's plans for us may include a time of suffering or sorrow, for reasons we may not know. But we trust that it will be for our good, as he spoke in Isaiah 55:8,9: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways....As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

The Lord promises to bring justice and help for his chosen ones, "and quickly," Jesus adds. Yet, remember that the Lord's timetable isn't the same as ours. His answer to us at times may be "Wait." Persist in prayer, and don't give up—the Lord will make it work out, in his own time.

When our Lord teaches us to persist, he's really teaching us to have faith. Persist in faith! That's what led Jesus to speak this haunting question: "However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" Jesus had just told his disciples before the parable that he, the Son of Man, will come suddenly, unexpectedly: "Two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left" (Lk. 17:34,35). The Lord will come and separate believers and unbelievers—the believers taken up to heaven, the unbelievers left behind, to be judged for hell.

So the answer to Jesus' question, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" seems obvious: Of course! Jesus just said he'll take believers with him. But Jesus wants to make us think: Will he find that kind of persistent faith when he comes again?

How the odds seem stacked against us in these latter days! There is still our adversary, the devil, prowling "like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pe. 5:8). Yes, he is chained, defeated by Jesus, but like a beast Satan's at his most dangerous when cornered, and now as he knows his time is limited, he's pulling out all the stops against us Christians to get us to question God's truth and doubt his love. There are the devil's allies in this world, those who attack Christianity, sometimes blatantly (like those who try to get us to shed our morals), and sometimes subtly (like trying to crowd our lives with so many extracurriculars we don't have time for prayer, for church, for God). And don't forget our Old Adam, our sinful self, constantly rising up and trying to steer us away from God and to choke our faith.

Do not give up! Persist! Remember, our Lord has already delivered us from these enemies. Jesus crushed the devil's power on the cross, so don't listen to him when he tempts; remain in Jesus. As for this world, Jesus tells us: "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). And recall that your Old Adam was drowned in Baptism. You have a New Self, created to be like Christ, by faith in him. Every day, return to your Baptism; drown the sinful nature with true sorrow and repentance, and let the New Self live in faith.

Persist, fellow Christians! Keep on keeping on in the faith! When your battles seem long, when help seems far away, turn to Jesus in prayer, and cling to Jesus in faith. Soon he will come, and you will find out that you're on the winning team because Jesus won the victory! Amen.