

# **The Unjust Judge and the Persistent Widow**

**October 20, 2019**

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Let us pray,

Lord Jesus, give us the gift and spirit of prayer with patience; and do by your gracious intercession supply our ignorance's, and passionate desires, and imperfect choices; procuring and giving us such returns of favor which may support our needs, and serve the ends of your Church and the Spirit, which thy wisdom chooses, and thy passion has purchased, and thy grace loves to bestow upon all thy saints and servants. AMEN

On a transatlantic cruise a professor from a seminary gave a lecture on prayers being answered. He gave the talk twice, once in the morning and then again later that afternoon. A man, who was a doubter, was asked what he thought about the talk. The doubter replied that he did not believe a word of what the professor said. That afternoon the professor gave the same address again and a number of people who attended in the morning were there for the afternoon lecture as well as the doubter. The doubting man just wanted to hear again what the professor who he thought was a charlatan had to say again.

Before the start of the lecture the doubter put two bananas in his pocket. On his way to the theater he passed an elderly lady who was sitting in a chase lounge on deck fast asleep. Her hands were open on each side of her and the man thought he would have some fun with her and placed a banana in each hand. After the lecture he saw the woman on deck eating one of the bananas he had placed in her hand. "You seem to be enjoying your banana", he said with a smile. "I sure am" she replied. "My Father is very good to me." "Your father?" he said. "Your father can't still be alive!" "Praise the Lord", the woman said. "He most certainly is very much alive." "How can that be"? the man asked. The lady proceeded to explain to the man, "Sir I have been sea sick for many days and I asked God to send me a banana to make me feel better. Upon hearing this, the man was speechless. He did not know what to say and walked away. It wasn't long after that he became a believer and a Christian.

Today's Gospel reading is a lesson about hope and not the false hope the secular world advocates. The reading is about having patient hope, a hope for those who are persistent and faithful.

In New Testament times women were held in low esteem. Their husbands, if they were married often regarded them as chattel or their personal property, and they were especially preyed upon by the spiritual leaders. Regrettably, the same situation still exists in many countries especially in Islamic countries. Women today are part of the fastest growing group of poor people in society. For many it is because their husbands have left them or they may have left their husbands because of abuse.

Have you ever wanted something so much that you kept asking for it time and time again until you finally got what you wanted? Many children do that and often parents give in to them. If so, you can understand how the widow in the “Parable of the Unjust Judge” felt in today’s Gospel reading.

Jesus told His disciples this parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. We are blessed for having the opportunity to speak to God, our Father, as His sons and daughters. When we call upon God, we speak as sons and daughters. The Spirit of God that is in us cries out, “Abba, Father.” Last spring I taught many of you in our Wednesday night Bible study that when we pray the Lord’s Prayer we address God as Father and in that address I mentioned that when we pray the Lord’s Prayer Jesus taught us to address God as Abba very intimately as a child talking to his daddy. When we make requests we do them as God’s own people, His beloved possession. When we pray we should make petitions not only for our own needs, but also for the needs of others. Even as Jesus, as He suffered upon the cross, asked His Father to “forgive them for they know not what they do”. His prayer also included all those who continue to crucify, revile, and despise Him. We who are members of the Body of Christ should pray also for the needs of those around us, especially those in most need of God’s mercy.

Now back to the widow in today’s Gospel reading. There once was a judge, not necessarily an honest or devout judge who had a widow come before him to beseech her case. He didn’t want to listen, but she came back, day after day, to plead her case. At last the judge gave in. Not because he had turned suddenly merciful, honest, or even objective. The judge said to himself, “Because this woman keeps bothering me. I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming”. ESV. Beat me down in the original Greek means, “She’s beating my reputation black and blue!”

As I mentioned earlier widows were among the most disadvantaged people in society back then. In spite of laws stating that they and other disadvantaged people were to be provided for and taken care of, they had few rights. They had no one to provide supporter for them and no one to look after them in their old age if they did not have any children. To make matters worse, judges were not always very ethical and could be influenced by bribes or friendship or other means

Moses appointed the first Hebrew judges while the people were still in their exodus from Egypt walking in the Sinai Desert. For centuries judges were the ethical leaders of their people. They developed and interpreted the common law of the Torah. They were honored by their tribes of Israel.

During the time of the Greek and Roman conquests of Israel and Judah the political system changed. By the time of Jesus, judges were political appointees of the ruling class. They were part of a corrupt leadership system. Their decisions could be sold and bought. We have *no* record of Jesus ever showing any admiration for judges.

The writers of New Testament often used women to indicate people who were vulnerable. In many ways the widow in today's Gospel reading was vulnerable. If a Jewish woman lost her husband after her 60th birthday she was considered to be a widow. If she were younger, Hebrew law expected her to remarry, preferably a brother of her first husband. In Matt 22:24 we read "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.'" Because most Jewish girls were married around their 14th birthday, and would have as many babies as they could produce may help to explain why many women died in their 30's. This may also help to explain why there were few widows in Israel.

A widow was allowed to inherit her husband's property, but it was often hard for her to keep it. Any relative or neighbor could claim it with the weight of common law on their side. A widow was also allowed to represent herself, as in today's Gospel, if she had no male relative to defend her. This widow was exercising her *right* to represent her plea. The judge was supposed to show impartiality to the woman.

But this widow was a persistent woman. I imagine her as a fast-talker with an attitude. That's probably how the judge saw her. She may have been like an angry little bantam chicken, like we had when I was growing up, that kept on pecking day after day, until he was black and blue.

Today's Gospel parable is also a lesson about waiting and not losing hope or faith. The parable says if we pray earnestly, faithfully and regularly, Jesus will find faith when he returns. If we are persistent in prayer, we will stay in touch with God. We must persevere in prayer because we must persevere in doing God's work, and that includes doing God's justice in an unjust world to help bring about the Kingdom of God here on earth.

In Matthew 7:7-8 we read "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened." ESV. Jesus is telling his disciples

that they should come to God in humility and awareness of need. Seeking connects one's prayer with responsible action in pursuing the will of God. Knocking suggest perseverance. Disciples are to persist in prayer, confident that their Father will provide whatever is best for them, according to his sovereign, gracious will.

That requires long, constant and persistent prayer. Sometimes the task seems hopeless, but we must never give up.

We must not grow weary of praying. Sometimes when we do we get discouraged and then we tend to want to give up. Sometimes God doesn't answer our prayers the way we want. He answers them as He sees fit and in the time He thinks necessary for us. Jesus tells us that if we continue to pray to our Father He will be more than ready to answer our prayers than the unjust judge. Peter tells us in 2 Peter. 3:8-9 "But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as on day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient towards toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." ESV. So when God delays in answering a prayer, it is for His good purpose. When He gives us something different, it is because He knows better than we do what we need. Why our prayers are answered differently than what we asked for will become apparent later.

We should not put off praying until it is convenient for us. Praying always means that we make conscious effort to pray daily. Our new Book of Common Prayer has many forms we can use for daily prayer. If you would like some guidance ask me, and I will be most happy to help you.

Jesus tells us that we should not give up. We need to persevere in our prayers. We need to have faith that God will answer. We should always pray daily and not give up. Have faith that God will answer you, because He will give more than what we either desire or deserve. One last thing to remember too is that prayer is not always about asking. We need to remember to thank God for all he blessings he has and continues to give us each day.

And now to God the Father, God the Son, and to God the Holy Spirit be ascribed all glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever.

AMEN