

Why Pray? ©**Luke 18:1-8****October 16, 2016****Rev. Sharlyn Gates**

It is a rare thing to go shopping in a WalMart or Meijer's or any grocery store, even, and not hear at least one child pleading with their parent to get them something that they think they just can't do without.

Please! Please let me have that toy. I promise I won't ask for anything else. Please can I have this candy? I promise I'll be good; I'll do what you ask. Please, Mom; please Gram; please just let me have this one thing! Just this one time.

Sometimes it turns into a real screaming tantrum, too. And sometimes we see the parent give in. Just to quiet that child down. Just to keep others from scowling at them.

Sometimes we see the parent or grandparent not give in. We might hear them say "I just bought you something yesterday." Or "You've had candy all week and too much candy is not good for you. Sorry, but you will have to do without it this time."

Sometimes the child quietly gives up. Most of the time they don't. Right?

Now we can say all we want about the persistent child. We might say they are spoiled or not very well behaved, the truth is, in most cases the child trusts the parent or grandparent.

Without even really thinking about it, the child just knows he can ask and beg and trust that whether he gets what he wants, or not, the adult in his life loves him and wants what is best for him.

In our text today, Jesus tells this parable about a widow who is being treated unfairly. She does not have that same confidence in the judge that a child has in their parent, but still she is persistent, even though Jesus says this judge doesn't care a hoot about people, or even about God.

He is an unjust judge. He could care less whether or not this widow – one of the marginalized people in society – was treated fairly.

But she would not give up. She just kept coming back over and over and over again, pleading with the judge to make things right for her. The judge says, "Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming."

The verb used that is translated as "wearing me out" is *hypopiazo* which literally is translated as "giving me a black eye." This powerless widow keeps pounding on the judge's nerves until he feels black and blue and just finally gives in.

That sounds kind of funny, doesn't it? But how many of us have prayed for justice in a situation? How many of us have begged for a good outcome and heard nothing but silence; have felt like we were pounding on a brick wall? And sometimes the complete opposite from what we prayed for has happened.

I know of several situations where that has seemed to be the case right here within our own church family. We prayed and prayed for someone to get well, but it didn't happen. We begged for justice and for the truth to be revealed and the opposite happened.

So why pray? We might wonder sometimes what the point is in praying. Does God really hear us? Does God really care? Is God like the unjust judge, not really caring about people? Why pray?

But Jesus says "if that judge who was unjust and uncaring gave the woman what she asked for because of her persistence, because he was tired of hearing from her over and over – how much more will God give you, his own precious, chosen child because he loves you?"

We are to pray always, Jesus says. Paul says to pray without ceasing. (1 Thess. 5:17) But does that seem realistic? To never stop praying? Don't we have to work? Go to school? To sleep? To talk to other people? How do we pray all the time, without ceasing?

For a Christian, it is about practicing the presence of God. It is about being mindful that God is always right there with us. That as we draw our breath in and let it out, we are aware that God is as close as our breath.

I have a little book that I keep coming back to. I found it when I was on retreat in Iowa at a Monastery for Cistercian nuns. These nuns were called by a bell to prayer seven times a day – one of those times was 3 or 4 in the morning. I was invited to attend their chapel prayer services. They would sing the psalms each time they gathered. I had that tune in my head for months after going home.

The book is written by Macrina Wiederkehr and is titled: "*Seven Sacred Pauses – Living Mindfully through the Hours of the Day.*" In the book, Macrina beautifully describes each of the designated hours for prayer and she also gives some beautiful prayers to use.

She tells a story about some westerners who hire some Bushmen guides to lead them through the Kalahari Desert. The westerners were like us – used to moving at a fairly rapid pace. But the Bushmen were not at all used to that pace.

All of sudden the bushmen sat down to rest and there was no persuading them to get up and continue on the journey until they were ready. The Bushmen explained that they had to wait for their souls to catch up.

Macrina writes: “Indigenous people often have an innate awareness of the need to honor the natural pace and rhythm of their inner beings. They seem able to pick up signals drawing them into a stance of obedient listening. The bushman of the Kalahari called this ancient knowing “the tapping of the heart.”¹

If we really think about it, I think we would agree that we need to listen to our souls, to listen and take heed of the tapping of our hearts. I don’t know about you, but with this election noise that is constant and angry, I need many sacred pauses in my day. A brief moment, fairly often, to stop and breathe and be mindful that God is right here with me.

God says, through the prophet Jeremiah, “I write this covenant on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.”

God is promising that instead of the covenant – the promise that God is with God’s children – instead of the covenant being taught to the people, it would be engraved on our hearts. We would know God’s presence and love from deep inside of us.

We who are believers are like the child who keeps asking and who keeps trusting that her parent or grandparent loves her; that even if she doesn’t get what she wants, her persistence isn’t going to change that love. In fact, even if she is upset for a time, deep inside she still knows that her parent is doing what is in her best interest.

We, who are God’s children, are like those in Jeremiah, we know – intimately know and trust – this heavenly parent. We don’t stop asking, and we trust that that is okay.

But somewhere deep inside we also have to accept that while we don’t understand, we can still trust God’s answers. Or, if we haven’t yet received an answer, we can trust that God is still present; still hearing us, continuing to love us and hold us close when we are hurt, or angry, or losing hope.

Why pray? Because when we pray we open up that connection – that communication path – with God.

We are saying, “I trust that you are here. I know you love me. I believe you hear me and care about me. I trust you are God – and I know I am not. I depend on you for everything.”

Why pray? Because by talking to God, we invite a conversation with our heavenly parent. We can trust that God will speak to us. Probably not in the way we speak to one another, but through our thoughts, our feelings, through situations in our life, through the words of others.

¹ Wiederkehr, Macrina, *Seven Sacred Pauses*, Sorin Books, Notre Dame, Indiana, ©2008, p. 22

Why pray? Because as God's own people, our ultimate desire should be like the widows – a desire for justice to be done on earth. For wrongs to be right; for truth to be known; for the oppressed to no longer be powerless. For Christ to return and at last God's Kingdom be restored on earth.

And Jesus asks, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

We must never give up on prayer. Be faithful and mindful and persistent because God loves you and wants the very best for his children. He will take care of us.

Will he find us faithful when he comes?

Why pray? Because Jesus told us to. And he taught us to pray like this ... will you join me in the Lord's Prayer?

Our Father ...

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