

Sermon Sunday 20 October 2019 Perseverance in Prayer

Luke 18:1-8

Our Gospel story is about a woman, a widow, who pesters a judge until she receives justice. She doesn't give up, she perseveres until he relents and gives her what she wants.

There wouldn't be an area of life where success is not invariably brought about through perseverance. Whether it is on the sports field, in the performing arts, in the classroom, in business, sweat and hard work, commitment and discipline are an essential ingredient in the recipe for success.

You may or may not have heard of William Carey, known as 'the father of modern missions.' He became a Baptist minister after working as a cobbler, served in India in the 18th century, translating the Bible into several languages, and was a social reformer, urging the government to outlaw such practices as infanticide (the killing of babies for reasons such as gender or poverty) and *suttee* (in which Hindu widows sacrificed themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres). He founded the Serampore University, the first degree-awarding university in India. His achievements were legendary. He set in motion the modern missionary movement, and this was despite countless obstacles being put in his path.

When asked towards the end of his life how, in the midst of so much adversity and misunderstanding, he could accomplish so much, he replied, 'I can plod. I can persevere in any definite pursuit. To this I owe everything. Few people know what can be done till they try and persevere in what they undertake.'

The same is applicable to prayer, and this is just the point Jesus is making in this short parable. So let us take a more detailed look at this story.

We get something of a peek at the judicial system of the time. Disputes were invariably taken directly to a magistrate or judge. This judge would have been appointed by the Romans and such judges were notorious. Unless plaintiffs had influence or money to bribe their way to a verdict, they had little hope of getting a settlement. This judge was no exception. He is motivated entirely by self-interest. He has no interest in either justice or the woman's rights. On the other side, we have a widow who represents the poor and the defenceless. Not only is she a woman, who of course had very limited rights in the society of that time, but she is a widow. Women were very much defined by who their husband was, so to have no husband meant that she had virtually no standing or status in society. So she was very much up against it. She had little going for her, but the one thing she did have was determination and perseverance.

So against all odds, the woman does receive justice. She does this purely and simply through her perseverance. Jesus is making the point that our approach to prayer must be of a similar nature. It is a theme that Paul takes up on more than one occasion. '*Keep on praying.*' 1 Thessalonians 5:17. '*Pray at all times and on every occasion in the power of the Holy Spirit.*' Ephesians 6:18.

So why should we have to persevere in prayer? Surely God hears us the first time and then can respond accordingly. It's a good question.

I would like to make a couple of points. Firstly, perseverance shows that we are sincere, that we mean business. This is not a request thrown out there in the hope that something might happen. This comes from the heart; this comes with conviction and a deep desire for a certain outcome. This is a genuine request.

Secondly, this is a genuine relationship. By speaking to God repeatedly and from the bottom of our heart we are building and developing our relationship with God. This is not just a one-off approach to God, this is serious, this is meaningful. Most importantly, this shows we have faith. This is expressed in the last verse of this reading, '*But when I, the Son of Man, return, how many will I find who have faith?*'

Think about it, if we didn't have faith, if we didn't believe in what we were doing, would we really persist? I don't think so. Commitment to a cause is a sure sign of belief in a cause. Time and time again we are urged in the Bible to pray and to pray. To cement our relationship with God, we need to adhere to this commitment. We have already alluded to examples from Paul in terms of that commitment.

The psalmist tells us, '*Evening and morning and at noon I will pray and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice.*' Another example from Paul, '*Don't worry about anything; instead pray about everything.*' Philippians 4:6. And of course Jesus himself spent many hours in prayer. '*One day soon after Jesus went to a mountain to pray, and he prayed to God all night!*' Luke 6:12.

There's supposedly a true story of a Welsh woman who lived in a remote village in Wales. She went to a great deal of trouble and expense to have electrical power installed in her home. However, after a couple of months the electrical company noticed she didn't seem to be using very much electricity at all. Thinking there might be a problem, they sent a meter reader out to check on the matter.

The man came to the door and said, 'We have just checked your meter and it doesn't seem that you are using much electricity. Is there a problem?'

'Oh no,' she said, 'We're quite satisfied. We turn on the electric lights every night to see how to light the lamps and then we switch them off again.'

Now, why didn't this woman make more use of her electricity? She believed in electricity. She believed the promises of the electricity company when they told her about it. She went to a great deal of trouble and expense to have her house wired for it. BUT, she didn't understand the potential of electricity in her home. She didn't really understand just what it could do for her. And so she used its power sparingly.

The question is, are we the same when it comes to prayer? We believe in prayer. We know of the promises God has made if we use prayer. We have all heard amazing stories about prayer. But why do we continue to use prayer sparingly?

Prayer works. Persevering with prayer makes it work even better! Prayer should be at the heart of everything we do. It is for that very reason I have asked, in this latest newsletter, for us all to pray for a successful outcome to the building of a new church

We should be like the 3-year old boy who went to the supermarket with his mother. Before they entered the supermarket, she said to him, 'Now, you're not going to get any chocolate chip cookies, so don't even ask!' She put him up in the child's seat in the trolley while she wheeled down the aisles.

He was doing just fine until they came to the biscuit section. He saw the chocolate chip cookies, stood up in the seat and said, 'Mum, can I have some chocolate chip cookies?' She said, 'I told you not to even ask. No, you're not getting any at all.'

They continued down the aisles, but as she searched for what she wanted, they ended back in the biscuit aisle. 'Mum, can I have some chocolate chip cookies?' 'Absolutely not,' she said. 'I have already told you, you can't have any, so sit down and be quiet.'

Finally, they were approaching the checkout lane. The little boy sensed that this might be his last chance. So just before they got to the line, he stood up on the seat and shouted, 'In the name of Jesus, may I have some chocolate chip cookies?'

Those around them applauded and guess what, the little boy and his mum left with several packets of chocolate chip cookies!

So the moral of the story is, persevere and Jesus will give you what you want.

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