

Proper 24, Luke 18:1-8
Rev. Kimberly Glenn
October 19, 2025

God of love and mercy: Give us wisdom to perceive you, intelligence to understand you, diligence to seek you, and a life to proclaim you. (from St. Benedict) Amen.

A woman arrived at the pearly gates of heaven. While she waited in line for St. Peter to greet her, she peeked through the bars of the gates to see what might be beyond them. Through the wide gaps between the bars, she saw a beautifully set banquet table. She smiled and her heart began to glow when she saw seated around the table her parents and all the people she knew and loved who had died before her. When St. Peter came to her, the woman said to him, "This is such a wonderful place! What do I need to do to get in?" St. Peter said, "All you have to do is spell a word." "Which word," the woman asked. "Love," said St. Peter. The woman correctly spelled 'Love' and St. Peter opened wide the gate and let her in.

About a year later, St. Peter came to the woman and asked her to watch the Gates of Heaven for him that day. While she was guarding the gates, her husband arrived. The woman was surprised and said, "Well, how have you been? I didn't expect to see you so soon!" He said, "Oh, I've been doing pretty well since you died. I married a beautiful young nurse, you know, the one who took care of you while you were ill. And then, to my surprise, I won the multi-state lottery! I sold the house you and I lived in and bought a mansion with a pool and a four car garage. Then my wife and I have been traveling all around the world. In fact, we were in Cancun when I fell off of a motor scooter. I wasn't wearing a helmet, daggone it. I never had a chance. How do I get past this gate?"

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“You have to spell a word,” the woman said. “Oh,” her husband said, “what word?” She said, without smiling, “Uzbekistan.” The question that ties this story to our gospel reading for today is: Was the woman a just or unjust gatekeeper? The theme for the story I shared and the gospel for today is: Justice will come, always and ultimately. According to the gospel text, in order to achieve justice, as illustrated by the widow who returns to the judge over and over and over again, faithful persistence is required. In a world like ours, where justice can be elusive, holding on to faith and being persistent in prayer can be quite a challenge. When our prayers for justice seem to go unanswered, hope can grow very thin.

To better understand this parable, let's agree on some basic assumptions. As Christians, we believe that the world that we live in was created by our one true God, the creator of the cosmos and all that it is in it, seen and unseen. And we believe in the divine realm, the heavenly realm where God reigns as one with Christ, His Son, and with the Holy Spirit. We believe that the heavenly realm is as Jesus revealed it to be, a place where there are no tears, there is no pain, there is only justice, compassion, love and mercy. Our hope is that through our relationship with God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit that God's kingdom will one day come through us, His beloved and precious children. We believe that God's justice will ultimately come.

In the parable, the human challenges to faithfulness as we experience it in our lives is represented by the widow and the unjust judge. Our faith and trust in the ultimate justice that God will bring is broken by the injustices we see and experience in our personal lives and through the news articles, video clips, and photographs. The

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widow represents people who lack the social status and the political power to bring justice about. The unjust judge represents the people who possess the power to make things happen but who are corrupt and lack any sense of compassion. In our divided world today, we have a hard time agreeing who the people are that fall into either of those categories. This is a perfect parable for our time, isn't it? Jesus tells us over and over that God will bring justice and mercy and love and compassion into our world. We who are Christian pray each Sunday, if not more often than that, "thy kingdom come, thy will be done." When people don't see it happening, do they lose faith? Is that perhaps why church membership has declined so much?

The story in this parable makes the point that persistent cries for justice can make all the difference. God hears them. If the unjust judge can be persuaded, Jesus says, how much more will God hear and respond? The widow's justice did not come easily, but she persisted. It took a long time for her voice and cries to penetrate the hardness of the judge's heart, but she got to him and he did what was right because of her. Would he have done what was right without her faithful persistence? Likely not.

The stubborn resistance that the judge portrays in this parable makes it clear that the judge does not represent God. God, our God, is not inclined to be stubborn or unjust. God, our God, does not have a heart that cannot be penetrated. His heart is open for us. It's just that God's response does not come according to our human calendars or our human clocks. God's responses come in God's own time. Sometimes the delay leads us to believe that God is not hearing our prayers and we can get frustrated and give up hoping against hope.

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But a hopeful example of God hearing our prayers is the recent ceasefire in the middle east. I know that war continues to rage in Ukraine and the prayers for that to end have been just as fervent. And many people do not trust that the middle east war has truly ended. Based on the parable we heard today, Jesus might say to us to continue to pray; that God has got these conflicts in hand. Our cries for justice are being heard and God is working through the hands, hearts, and minds of all people who hear him and are guided by him. Jesus doesn't deny the waiting that we must do, but he says: *don't give up*. Keep praying because praying keeps us close to God even when the world feels far from just. And prayer connects us to God and makes us available to Him to keep the arc of God's will for us bending toward justice.

God's justice unfolds slowly and in ways that we cannot predict. In the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. often spoke about the "long arc of the moral universe." They knew justice was slow, but they kept pressing forward, kept marching, kept praying. Dr. King once said: *"Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase."* Sticking with that metaphor, persistence is taking that second step after that first one, and then the next and the next. That's the widow's spirit that she showed in persistently making demands that the judge make things right for her.

In every generation, even in our own, God calls us all to the same faith and trust in Him. He wants us to keep showing up, to keep crying out, to keep trusting, even when justice seems delayed because His promise to us is that justice will ultimately come.

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So where does this leave us? It leaves us with a challenge and a promise. We are left with the question Jesus asks at the end of his parable: *When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?* Will we still be praying? Will we still be trusting? Will we still be standing with the vulnerable? Will we still be opening our hearts to be God's vessels to bring justice? God gave us the free will to decide for ourselves. And God's promise to us is this: God hears us. God sees what we need. Justice on earth may be a long time coming, but God is not forsaking us.

So pray. And don't lose heart.

Let us pray:

"Faithful God, you hear the cries of the powerless and the prayers of your people. Teach us to be persistent in prayer, to trust you in the waiting, and to stand with those who long for justice. Give us courage not to lose heart, and faith to keep showing up until your kingdom comes in fullness. Through Christ our Lord we pray, Amen."