

2022 16TH OCTOBER WORSHIP AT HOME – THE WORK OF PRAYER

Dear friends, This week we read a striking and challenging parable in which a widow pesters a judge until he at last issues a judgement in her favour. Jesus suggests that if an unjust judge would reward persistence, then how much more will God respond to the needs of the faithful! I suppose, though, that we are conditioned in today's world to expect everything to happen at the click of a button, God's timetable is planned more carefully and we might need to re-assess the long-term commitment to our work of praying, as we consider how God unfailingly responds to us.

Every day we hear the news of this country and of the world around us, it can be easy to feel that whatever we say or do is hopeless – and life is difficult – but keep praying and believing for God does hear us. Every blessing, *Margaret*.

Call to worship: let us pause and consider God's point of view. He is outside time and space, for he created both.

When we pray, God hears us, and when the time is right, he responds.

When we pray, God knows our needs and when his time is right, God meets our needs.

Let us come to God in prayer now.

Lord, we come now to worship and to bring our prayers.

Teach us to be patient as we wait for your response.

We know that you hear all our prayers, however they are made and whoever we are.

Give us faith to trust your awesome love and care for us. **Amen.**

God, source of life and strength, we approach you with longing hearts and addled minds.

May you lift our faces to see you, even when we find the world puzzling and unclear.

Help us to know you better.

Draw close to us today. **Amen.**

The words to 'Rock of Ages' written by Augustus Montague Toplady [1740-1778] StF 434

1 Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee;

let the water and the blood, from thy riven side which flowed,
be of sin the double cure, cleanse me from its guilt and power.

2 Not the labours of my hands can fulfil thy law's demands;
could my zeal no respite know, could my tears for ever flow,
all for sin could not atone; thou must save, and thou alone.

3 Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling;
naked, come to thee for dress; helpless, look to thee for grace;
foul, I to the fountain fly; wash me, Saviour, or I die.

4 While I draw this fleeting breath, when mine eyes shall close in death,
when I soar through tracts unknown, see thee on thy judgement throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee.

Prayer: Lord, you are our keeper, the one who watches over us – you are always present, ever loving and ever faithful.

You are our Creator and Redeemer and we praise you for your kindness and justice, and for all that you are. **Amen.**

Lord, forgive us when we have closed our eyes to the things that matter – when we have prioritised the trivial surface matters over urgent needs and deep-seated justice.

Forgive us when we have chosen to look away from those who need us the most.

Forgive us when we have stretched ourselves so thin that we do not have time and energy for that which you call us to do and to be.

Forgive us and restore us, we pray. Give us what we need to live, love, and pray persistently, in the power and counsel of your Spirit. **Amen.**

Loving God, we know you hear us. You not only hear us but you accept us as your children, surrounding us with grace and forgiveness.

Thank you for your unconditional love. **Amen.**

Lord, we thank you that you are our place of help. Where others fail us and circumstances change, you remain, and you are unchanging.

Your love supports us, underpinning us with a strength beyond ourselves.

We praise you for your passion for justice, and for your kindness towards your people.

We thank you that you call us to a life-giving existence, that we may give and receive in your name, learning your ways and caring for your world. **Amen.**

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Luke 18: 1-8: [The Message – Eugene Peterson]:

Jesus told them a story showing that it was necessary for them to pray consistently and never quit. He said: "There was once a judge in some city who never gave God a thought and cared nothing for people. A widow in that city kept after him saying: 'My rights are being violated. Protect me!'

He never gave her the time of day. But after this went on and on he said to himself: 'I care nothing what God thinks, even less what people think, but because this widow won't quit badgering me, I'd better do something and see that she gets justice – otherwise I'm going to end up beaten black-and-blue by her pounding.'

Then the Master said: "'Do you hear what that judge, corrupt as he is, is saying? So what makes you think that God won't step in and work justice for his chosen people who continue to cry out for help? Won't he stick up for them? I assure you, he will. He will not drag his feet.

But how much of that persistent faith will the Son of Man find on the earth when he returns?"

Meditation of Andrew. [Nick Fawcett – A Most Amazing Man C]:

They came as such a relief, those words of his, for I'm as guilty as any, tending to badger God in prayer, refusing to take no for an answer.

I had been wondering if that was wrong – if God would get sick and tired of the same old refrain day after day – perhaps even ignore me as a result, so I'd resolved to give it a rest, lest I test his patience too far.

Only, I couldn't have been more wrong, as Jesus brought home so clearly in that wonderful parable of his. I thought at first he was likening God to some reprobate old judge – some cantankerous old so-and-so who, though reluctant to hear, can finally be worn down if we persist long enough.

But that wasn't the point at all, for Jesus wasn't so much comparing as *contrasting* God, emphasising that the two couldn't be more different.

Though we may not realise it, God is *always* listening – *always* looking to respond – *always* eager to grant his blessing. So if he doesn't seem to answer, it's not because he doesn't want to – still less that we've asked too often – but because his reply is yet to come.

It may not be today, or tomorrow, or even the day after that – but never be afraid to ask and ask again, for if anyone delights to hear and promises to answer it's surely *him*.

Comment:

For Luke it was important that Christians did not lose heart. The immediate context for Luke was that Jesus had not yet returned to claim his own, the world remained a difficult place for God's people – a place where good seemed all too easily to be overcome by evil.

Like all parables, this one tells a seemingly ordinary story – here one of judicial corruption, and of a determined plaintiff who badgers the judge into acting on her behalf, in order to get her off his back. There is more, however. The supreme judge is, of course, God who is just and merciful. The contrast between these two judges could not be clearer for the judge in the parable is far from being in the image of God.

We are also reminded that the experience of prayer is complex as prayers may be prayed, but the outcomes of each can be difficult to identify.

Does God listen? Is the one who prays supposed to persuade God into action?

Prayer is indeed a very complex part of faith, but the nub of the parable is this: prayer is an act of faith. Just as the woman in the parable has faith in justice – and this does work out for her, though after a struggle – prayer is a part of the struggle of faith. And, while it may be a struggle, that doesn't mean that God isn't listening or that he isn't paying attention. God is just, so therefore his actions are just.

Finally, we should note that the plaintiff is not only a woman, but a widow. As a widow she would be treated as an outcast, especially if she had no children. Once again, God's focus is upon those who are marginalised by society, the conventional power of the world.

Illustration: [from Sermon Illustrations by David Adam]:

St Teresa of Avila showed a great enthusiasm for life. In the front of her prayer book these words were written:

*Let nothing disturb thee,
nothing affright thee,
all things are passing,
God never changes.
Patient endurance
attaineth to all things.
Who God possesses
in nothing is wanting.
God alone suffices.*

These are deep words indeed and should be thought about with care.

Prayer:

Thank you, Lord, that though we struggle in prayer, finding ourselves lost for words or endlessly repeating ourselves, always you listen, never tired of hearing us.

Teach us, then, to persevere, looking for your answer until it becomes clear – not necessarily the response we hope for, but always the reply we need. **Amen.**

We pray for those able to grant the requests of men and women who come before them:

For judges in our courts – may they be wise, and not influenced by the powerful;
for governors who can grant stays of execution – may they put compassion before popularity;
for employers who can improve conditions and lighten loads – may they put generosity before profit;
for members of parliament who can influence policies – may they put integrity before ambition;
for editors who can form public opinion – may they put truth before emotionalism;
for ourselves when we are asked for help – may we be ready and supportive.

We pray in Jesus' name. **Amen**

Lord, sometimes I find it hard to see the blessing in my struggles, when I am tired, and discouraged, and lonely.

I find it hard to keep praying when I feel tired and stale and defeated.

Grant me the energy, the faith, and the perseverance of the widow, that I may rejoice again.

In Jesus' name I pray. **Amen.**

The words to 'Sometimes a light surprises' written by William Cowper [1731-1800] Hymns & Psalms 571

1 Sometimes a light surprises the Christian while he sings;

It is the Lord who rises with healing in his wings:

When comforts are declining, he grants the soul again

A season of clear shining, to cheer it after rain.

2 In holy contemplation, we sweetly then pursue

The theme of God's salvation, and ever find it new.

Set free from present sorrow, we cheerfully can say,

Now let the unknown morrow bring with it what it may.

3 It can bring with it nothing but he will bear us through;

Who gives the lilies clothing will clothe his people too:

Beneath the spreading heavens no creature but is fed;

And he who feeds the ravens will give his children bread.

4 Though vine nor fig-tree neither their wonted fruit should bear,

Though all the field should wither, nor flocks nor herds be there,

Yet, God the same abiding, his praise shall tune my voice,

For, while in him confiding, I cannot but rejoice.

Closing Prayer and Blessing:

Lord our God, you promise to stay awake,

you protect us,

you hear all of our prayers,

you want us to keep talking to you.

You are God of everything and we look up to you.

Bless us as we trust in you.

Send us out to work, and live, and pray.

In Jesus' name, our Saviour and Redeemer. **Amen.**

And may the blessing of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – be with us and all whom we love and all for whom we pray, this day and throughout eternity. **Amen,**