

Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost
Jeremiah 31:27-34, Psalm 119:97-104, Luke 18:1-8
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Some years ago, Mother Theresa planned a visit to the office of a super-lawyer named Edward Bennett Williams in Washington, D. C. Her purpose was to enlist Williams' assistance in building a hospice for AIDs patients.

Fortunately, Williams had learned the purpose of Mother Theresa's visit beforehand. He confided in a friend that AIDs assistance was not his favorite charity, and together they crafted a polite refusal. Williams then practiced what he would say before Mother Theresa arrived in his office.

When the time came, she made her proposal, and Williams, nicely but firmly, said that he was sorry but he could not help her. Mother Theresa then said, "Let us pray," and bowed her head. Williams rolled his eyes, but he bowed his head while she prayed.

After her prayer, Mother Theresa once again asked Williams for money to build the AIDs hospice. She made exactly the same appeal that she made before her prayer. Williams again politely but firmly told her that he was sorry and he couldn't help. Mother Theresa said, "Let us pray." Williams rolled his eyes again, but what was he going to do! He bowed his head as Mother Theresa prayed.

In spite of his preparation, Williams saw the handwriting on the wall. Mother Theresa had trapped him in his own office. When she ended her prayer, Williams said, "All right! All right!" and pledged his support to the project.

A visit from Mother Theresa would have been no less than a visit from God. Who could say no?

In today's parable, the judge who neither feared God nor respected people likewise could hold out for only so long. The widow who had been wronged

was relentless in her demand that the judge grant her justice. The judge doesn't rule in her favor because she has a strong case, but rather because the judge is fed up with her continually annoying him. We might say he finally did the right thing but for the wrong reasons.

In contrast, Jesus wants us to understand that God will do the right thing for the right reason because justice is important and widows need protection from the unscrupulous. In earlier times, widows didn't inherit their husband's estates. Sons or the closest male relative did. Over and over again in the Bible, in both testaments, it says, widows, orphans, sojourners and the poor are to be treated with special care exactly because of their vulnerability in the social order.

The context for this parable is in regard to prayer. We are to pray always and not lose heart. Does this imply that if we badger God long and hard enough, God will finally relent and give us what we want? Can we change God's mind and heart with unending clamor? Let's hope God is not like that.

As good parents know, giving children everything they think they need, when they think they need it, can be disastrous.

In the newspaper, last week, Dear Abby answered a letter from a grandmother who wrote that she finally broke down and gave her granddaughter her own smart phone. Within days of getting it, the young girl could not get up for school in the morning because she had been texting her boyfriend all night until 4:00 a.m. Furthermore, when her best friend came over to visit, the friend had to be entertained by the grandmother because the granddaughter was so preoccupied with her new device.

The grandmother was asking Abby what she should do. As if it wasn't obvious!

Prayer is not first and foremost about getting things from God, even though it is sometimes used that way. Prayer is first and foremost about

maintaining our connection with God, being reminded that we are in God and God is in us. Prayer, rather than changing God's heart and mind or persuading God to do our bidding, is intended to change us and persuade us to do God's bidding.

When I have turned to God about big, personal things, I've found that answers or results come very slowly and usually after a considerable amount of time, usually years. God, it seems, needs time for me to be changed or to better understand what I should properly be asking for.

Maybe you've heard this before. It's from an unknown source:

I asked for strength that I might achieve; I was made weak that I might learn to receive.

I asked for help that I might do great things; I was given infirmity that I might do better, more compassionate things.

I asked for riches that I might be happy; I was given less that I might be wise. I asked for all things that I might enjoy life; I was given life that I might enjoy all things.

I was given nothing that I asked for but received everything that I had hoped for. Despite myself, my prayers were answered; I am among people most richly blessed.

The widow is obviously the character in this parable Jesus wants us to be most like even if her nagging is annoying for sure. It's her tenaciousness that Jesus likes. It's her persistence and feistiness that Jesus wants for us, her no-quit, never say die attitude.

Similarly, in scripture and elsewhere we have heard:

Seek ye first the Kingdom of God.

Pray without ceasing.

Never flag in showing zeal.

Fight the good fight, finish the race.

Carpe Diem – Seize the Day.

Follow your dream.

Live with passion.

Kiss like you mean it.

Or as my father often said, "If you are going to do a job, do it as best you can."

Charles Spurgeon wrote:

"Prayer pulls the rope below and the great bell rings above in the ears of God. Some scarcely stir the bell, for they pray so languidly.

Others give but an occasional pluck at the rope.

But the one who wins with heaven is the one who grasps the rope boldly and pulls continuously with all one's might.

We may not always get what we want from God, but as Mick Jagger, said, "If we try..," if we pull boldly and continuously, "we'll get what we need," including, and most importantly, the assurance that God is closer than the air we breathe. AMEN.