

Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost  
Jeremiah 31: 27-34, Psalm 119, Luke 18:1-8  
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I went out to get in my Honda Fit the other day, which is not two years old yet, and noticed an odd sort of tear in the side of the plastic bumper which faces the road. The damage looked like something tried to cut a square out of it. I attempted to fix it as best I could with little success, and was quite puzzled over how it might have occurred.

Not long after, I happened to notice the trash pickup service truck mechanically grabbing a trash can with its two metal arms. Each arm looked just about the same size as the cuts in my front bumper.

Ever since, I witnessed this, I have been calling Container First Services every day to register my concern. Each time, a nice woman refers me to a man who never seems to be in his office. I have left message after message without a return call yet. I will persist until I get an answer.

Persistence and perseverance are clearly the key themes in today's parable story of the unjust judge and the poor widow. Maybe persistent Chicago Cubs fans will finally have a World Series victory to celebrate if their baseball team can continue winning. Their last world championship was 107 years ago.

Of course, the parable speaks to the faithful's persistence in prayer and faith. The point Jesus is making is that God is not at all like the unjust judge. Our God will hear the cries of those who pray.

It is most likely that Luke uses this parable to console first-century Christians who have thrown in their lot with the young Jesus movement and are being persecuted. They may be wondering if Jesus is coming back as soon as promised to deliver them from persecution and award them with the riches of eternity.

When we look at our country, it is apparent that church goers are in decline. We may be tempted to join those who have decided they have better things to do on Sunday morning than go to church. This parable urges us to stay the course, buck the tide and persist in our church involvement so that Jesus does find faith on earth when he comes again.

Additionally, this parable may raise some questions about the efficacy of prayer. Does God act only if we badger? Do we change God's mind and will with our endless tenacity?

I came across this great quote in my preparation for this sermon. I don't know its original source. "Prayer is not intended for us to change the will of God but for us to discover it."

I had lunch with the rabbi Thursday and we talked about prayer. He told me this true story about a Jewish shoe salesman who lived in a city in Poland shortly before the German invasion in 1939. He had travelled the considerable distance to the factory where he always bought shoes for his store. On this occasion, however, the non-Jewish factory owner had already begun to be influenced by the German propaganda against Jews. The man bought some 100 pairs of shoes only to find out that when he got them back to his shop the boxes all contained right-footed shoes only.

When he went home that night for dinner he told his wife that because he had been cruelly tricked now they would never be able to sell enough shoes to get the money they would need to leave Poland. She told him to go see a certain rabbi in the city known for performing miracles. He went reluctantly.

The rabbi heard his tale of woe and told him to go to the largest synagogue in the city and pray his heart out. He went home and told his wife that the rabbi was of no help whatsoever. All he told him to do was to go and pray. The man's wife said that he should go because what did he have to lose by going anyway. Again, the man went reluctantly.

He found the synagogue, went into the empty building and began to pray and weep over his situation and that of all the Jews trapped in Poland. After a long while, when he finally stopped crying, he heard another man weeping. He went to him and asked what his sad story was. The man told him that he was a shoe salesman, and the last time he had bought shoes for his store the factory owner had given him all left-footed shoes.

Prayer is not intended to change the will of God but to discover it. I think this is a profound learning.

Other things we have all learned about prayer are that we don't always get what we pray for. I have also learned by experience that often prayers take a long time to be answered, if at all, probably because there are things God wants to teach me first.

If you have found prayer to be confusing and you wonder if it does any good at all, I submit the following poem by a Christian who persisted in prayer and faith no matter what.

*I asked God for strength that I might achieve; I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey.*

*I asked for help that I might do greater things; I was given infirmity that I might do better things.*

*I asked for riches that I might be happy; I was given poverty 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 I was given everything that I had hoped for.*

*Despite myself, my prayers were answered; I am among all people most richly blessed.*

May we all persevere in prayer, learn its lessons and let God guide us into his will on earth as it is in heaven. AMEN.