

Three Chopt Presbyterian Church  
Dr. Brenda Halbrooks, preaching  
October 21, 2007  
11:00 a.m. Transcript  
On Not Losing Heart

## **Luke 18:1-8**

**18** Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. <sup>2</sup>He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. <sup>3</sup>In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' <sup>4</sup>For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, <sup>5</sup>yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" <sup>6</sup>And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. <sup>7</sup>And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? <sup>8</sup>I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth

During the summer when I was five years old I was sent to stay with my grandmother in Birmingham, Alabama, along with my two older brothers, who were 10 and 11 years old. I was very excited because my mother was about to have a baby. And for five long years I had suffered as the younger sister to two older brothers. And I knew that now justice would prevail and scores would be settled and I would have a cohort in crime and my mother would have a baby girl. I remember the day the phone rang and I hid under a desk in my grandmother's bedroom as she answered the phone. A boy! How wonderful! I burst into tears. I was devastated. God and I had an understanding. I thought that God would answer my prayers.

Larry Crabb is a Christian psychologist who has written many books. In one book he talks about being ten years and hearing for the first time the passage in the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus says: "Whatever you ask of God, God will give you." Larry heard these words, they sounded good to him. Larry wanted to fly like Superman. So he went out into his front yard and he said: "God, I want to fly like Superman. I know you can handle this so I will jump into the air and you take it from here." Four times Larry jumped into the air and each time he progressed another four inches down the driveway.

And as Larry reflects back on this experience he says: “I asked, I believed, and I did not receive. And thus began a lifelong journey of confusion about prayer.”

Prayer is difficult for us. When we go to pray, there are questions that arise for us. Is there a God? Is there a God who hears me? Is there a God who cares about me? Is there a God who will respond to me? These are difficult questions and there are many who just decide not to pray at all rather than have the pretense of praying when their heart is not in it. Jesus knows that prayer is difficult for us and so he tells the parable here in the gospel of Luke about our need to pray and not lose heart.

This parable is about a man who is a cantankerous judge and a woman who is a persistent widow. The widow comes to the judge and asks for justice against her opponent. And it is said that the judge doesn't like people. He's never met a man that he liked. He doesn't like people. And he has no respect for God. And the widow would be a person in that time period who would not have a lot of power. She is not able to inherit her husband's property. But she has one thing going for her. That is she knows how to be a pest. She leaves messages on his answering machine. She corners him on the golf course in front of his buddies. She bangs on his door. She is persistent, doggedly determined, she knows what she wants and she goes after it. And finally the judge says to himself: “I don't like people. I don't care anything about God. But I am going to give this woman what she wants just to get her off my back, out of my hair and as far away from me as possible.”

Now, it might seem like this is a parable telling us that if we just keep after God, if we are just persistent enough, God will give us what we want.

Some of you may have seen the movie that came out in 2003 entitled Bruce Almighty in which Jim Carrey plays a newscaster in Buffalo, New York, who suffers a series of disappointments in life, and he prays to God and says: “God my life is a shambles. And by the way you are doing a terrible job as Supreme Deity.” God appears to him and says: “Why don't you see if you can do a better job?” And he grants him God's powers for a few weeks. And he finds that he is overwhelmed by the prayer requests that he receives. And in one scene that is particularly funny he opens up his computer email and finds that he is barraged with an endless list of email requests of prayer coming before God. And he is so frustrated that he punches one button and answers “yes” to all the prayers, which results in complete chaos around the world, including thousands of people winning the lottery and each person receiving \$1.39.

It might seem like this parable is about our being persistent with God enough and therefore receiving exactly what we want.

But the truth is, this parable is not about our being persistent, this parable is about God being consistent. This parable is not telling us to be persistent, this parable is telling us that God is consistent. This is not a parable that tells us what to do – it is a parable that tells us who God is. This is not a parable that tells us what we should do – it is a parable that tells us who God is.

For notice what Jesus says after telling the parable. He says if this cantankerous judge will give this widow what she wants, how much more will God give you everything that you need? How much more will the God who created you and loves you, the God who loves us and redeems us give us everything that we need?

We are tempted to lose heart. We live in a broken world with war and injustice. We are tempted to lose heart. Many of us face tremendous personal challenges. Some of us are constant caregivers, caring for aging parents and growing children. Some of us have faced tremendous obstacles in life, such as the failure of our vocation or a marriage. We face tremendous pressure each day – young people face challenges each day – we are tempted to lose heart.

And there is a way in which we are perhaps like the cantankerous judge. Sometimes we find people to be annoying. Sometimes we close ourselves off from God. Sometimes we create our own little closed universe where we really don't want to hear about the needs and problems of others. And if we are in a way like the cantankerous judge then perhaps God is like the persistent widow, constantly breaking into our closed universe, constantly tugging on our heart and drawing us away, constantly pursuing us by becoming incarnate in Christ and in the Jeremiah passage God says I will give you a new covenant and I will write it on your hearts.

If the cantankerous judge is inside of each of us, then our persistent prayer wears him down and wears him out until our voice becomes in tune with the voice of God, looking for ways to provide justice in the community, looking for ways to share God's grace, looking for ways to share the gospel message.

That same summer when I was selfishly praying for a baby sister, a group of people gathered here in the West End to pray about beginning a new congregation. And because of their prayer we are here today. Will we follow in their footsteps? And follow in their example in being persistent in prayer and following God's will and God's way?

At the very end of the parable Jesus says: "When the Son of Man returns will he find faith in the earth?" And the question for us: Will we be faithful to the God who created, redeemed us and loves us. Will we pray always and not lose heart? Amen.