

**Bethel Anglican Church**

**St. John's Street**

**St. John's, Antigua**

**The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost:**

**Proper 24 (C)**

**October 20, 2019**

**DRAFT**

**A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish**

**“Don't give up; keep on keeping on”**

**The Gospel: Luke 18:1-8**

Jesus told the disciples a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose

heart. He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my opponent.’ For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, ‘Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.’” And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he

delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them.”

Create in us clean hearts, O God, and sustain us by your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Pastor Bob Ove writes, “This text sounds like good advice: don’t stop praying for what you need and want.

Rev. Bob continued: “I talked with a prisoner when I was chaplain at the prison. He told me that he was wrongly accused of his conviction for robbing a store in my home town. I looked at his records and took a photo of the prisoner to the clerk at the

store that was robbed. The clerk said he had not seen that man before. I got him a retrial and they cleared him and found the guilty one who looked somewhat similar. It took a whole year to clear him, but his prayer was answered. We thanked the Lord together when he was released with apologies.”

Pastor Ove continued, “My mother prayed that I would become a pastor for 30 years and finally the Lord answer when I became ordained when I was just over 30 years old.” I was 45 when I was ordained.

Then Pastor Ove continued, “One of my kids begged me for a bicycle for three years before he got it. I thought he was too young

before that. The Lord may wait for just the right time. Only God knows.” Our church should teach us determination — praying for strength to wait patiently. Jesus was wrongly accused and suffered on a cross but the reward was resurrection and everlasting life. Jesus passes on that reward to those who put their faith in him.”

We need to continue in prayer. A 2014 Pew Research Center survey found that 23% of Americans never pray and that 23% of us engage in prayer only weekly or monthly. We need more persistence, the kind of persistence Jesus urges. John Calvin makes

this point well: “We know that perseverance in prayer is a rare and difficult attainment; and it is a manifestation of our unbelief that, when first prayers are not successful, we immediately throw away not only hope but all ardour of prayer.” (Calvin’s Commentaries, Vol.XVI/2, p.198)

Just because we don’t seem to get what we want in prayer does not mean that God is not listening or giving us what we need. Anglican Priest John Wesley claimed that this gospel lesson today “warns us against two fatal extremes with regard to prayer; the former against faintness and weariness, the

latter against self-confidence.”

[Commentary On the Bible, p.449]

For what then should we pray? Famed modern Catholic theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin reflected on his hopes for what might happen when we pray: “Lord lock me up in the deepest depths of your heart; and then, holding me there, burn me, purify me, set me on fire, sublimate me, till I become utterly what You would have me be, through the utter annihilation of my ego.” (Hymn of the Universe, p.32) [cited by the Rev. Mark Ellingsen]

The Rev. Bonnie Bates offers this advice: “Jesus continues to teach the people how to

pray. In this parable, Jesus reminds us to be persistent in our prayers. I've never liked the assumption that God is the unjust judge, for I don't believe that is how we view or see God. Yet, there is a gift in prayer persistence. Interestingly, persistent prayer changes us. We develop a stronger and more intimate relationship with God. We build the prayer "muscles" we need to face whatever comes, to be prepared when even deeper and stronger prayer moments are needed. It's worth remembering that God answers prayer, but not always in our time and in the way we choose. So pray with

persistence. Pray often. Build your prayer ‘muscles.’ God is listening.”

A story is told about St. Teresa (1515–1582) of Avila as she made her way to her convent during a fierce rainstorm, the great saint slipped down an embankment and fell squarely into the mud. The irrepressible nun looked up to heaven and admonished her Maker, “If this is how You treat Your friends, no wonder why You have so few of them!”

<http://www.ncregister.com/blog/astagnaro/if-this-is-how-you-treat-your-friends>

It is a humorous story often told, but as I reflected on it a bit, I could see a bit of myself in the saint's shoes, also admonishing God for my own carelessness and mistakes. Maybe you have had some of those lapses also. We want to focus the blame for our own shortcomings and sins on someone else, on anyone else, even on God our heavenly Father.

Many poor and oppressed people are crying out to God continuously for help. And will God not give them help, even if we who may be able to help refuse to hear or ignore their cries? We may be judging

others, while often rarely lifting our own able hands to help.

A few years back, some younger man maybe in his early twenties was standing in a store doorway in New York with some of his friends and said to me as I walked by, “Hey, Father, help me out,” and he held out his hand. I sort of looked askance at him; he didn’t seem needy; he was dressed OK. I thought to myself, is this just another scam? And when I averred, one of his friends said (about me), “He’s not a Roman Catholic priest (I was wearing my collar). ‘They’ have to give you something.” Ouch. Maybe I was in too much of a hurry to get to the

bottom of his ask: was he really needing something at the store? And could it have been likely that he indeed had nothing to buy a bit of food? I'll never know, but I was not immediately in a giving mode that day. Maybe you have been there also. I was perhaps an unjust judge, once again. But it did teach me to be more understanding. And maybe I was a bit better prepared for the next ask.

Later I was advised by my City Councilman not to give out money, but to call 311 and ask them to help the person who was in need. If they are homeless or in

particular need, the 311 operator will send out a social work team in less than an hour to offer help, I was told.

So I tried that the next time. I called 311. But, I found my “solution” did not help. And the person whom I told I had called 311 about (for a team which actually often arrives), he went into a near fit saying, “Last time they came they put me in jail because I was sitting on the sidewalk.” Ah, unjust judge again. So, I had to do some serious heart investigation of myself. Was I simply ignoring the needs of many or some? What was God calling me to do? I have assets. I am not at all homeless. I eat three meals

every day. I am even often on a diet because I occasionally eat too much. Where was the widow encountering me in my state of injustice? Have you ever considered that God comes to us as a widow, pleading for our help? Is that person who is standing there all afternoon, man or woman, really in need?

Well, the person I had sickled 311 on was standing or sitting there for hours each day; no cup, no outstretched hand; pleading occasionally very quietly for anything, but looking rather shabby. He had clean clothes, but he was always wearing the same clothes day in and day out, week in and

week out. So I approached him again, and we engaged in conversation. He was staying at night often sitting upright in a chair in a shelter out on Staten Island or in the Staten Island Ferry Terminal and came in the City to this spot in midtown each day to try to get enough money to eat that day and make his commute back to the city shelter on Staten Island. He said sometimes if he get extra money, he was able to stay at a motel near the shelter instead. He then was about 63 years old. His problem was that he could not work because he had had several surgeries on his legs for blood clots. And most of his jobs before the surgeries were

“off the books”, so he did not have any retirement income; his employers never withheld or paid his Social Security. His walk sometimes seemed painful. And there was a crutch nearby occasionally. So I listened to his story. I saw him nearly every day, same place, same time, often looking discouraged, sometime standing, sometimes sitting, and I help him. In one conversation he told me he had called a lawyer at a big firm who had agreed to see him. Within a week after that visit to the lawyer, the lawyer had him visit the law firm’s medical doctor. But still he never got help. The first objective I saw was to try to get him some

Disability Income. But the winter was not long from then. I think it is possible that he represents the widow in today's Gospel lesson, and perhaps the Federal Government may represent one of the unjust judges who needs to be worn down a bit to find a way to help him. What do you think?

Well, that was the situation in 2016 when I first reported this to my congregation. But as someone has said, "I prayed on it." And I kept praying on it. But as you surely and hopefully know, praying with our mind is often not nearly enough. So, what to do? Maybe that is the question we need to ask. What are we to do? In today's gospel, the

poor widow kept coming to the judge. But in our day and time, what does a judge look like? Is it a person with black flowing robes, maybe wearing a wig, as the attorney's do in England? Are they the the only judges in our societies? Perhaps not. And, indeed, as I have found, those folk in black robes are rarely the judges. The judges are more often, at least in the United States, the judges are more often 'regulations' that legislators have agreed upon to limit the country's or state's responsibility and liability. Then in the US at least, those 'regulations' can be imposed by cooperative social workers.

But the story of my beggar friend did not stop there. I kept praying. My wife and I kept praying. And I urge you to keep praying for those who are desperately poor amongst us. There are many direly poor on this island, I can attest to by my own visual inspection.

My friend, I no longer saw him as an object, but I began to see him as my friend. Can we be friends with someone who has nothing? God is. Jesus used their example to guide all of us. Remember the widow who put two tiny coins in the offering plate? She is a saint forever.

We kept praying for him. I knew his name. We prayed for him by name. Lo and behold, since I volunteered as a disaster chaplain in New York City, a massive hurricane happened in Puerto Rico, which you may remember, and I was called in to help speak to the refugee families and persons who came to a school in the middle of Harlem where the City had set up in the school auditorium about eight or ten booths for getting people help through various and sundry city and volunteer and federal social services agencies. As I began to learn the ‘help system’ from the Puerto Rican hurricane refugees, I began to see how this

very process could indeed also help my friend way down in another part of Manhattan. So, I brought him with me one day. He went in just like every other refugee, but he was with me; I was recognized as one of the Chaplains there to help. I quickly got him to a very caring group of federal workers who immediately began the process they used with every other refugee, and within maybe a month of so, he had Social Security help, Medicaid and Medicare Cards, and shortly thereafter he began receiving a small but important stipend from Social Security. [I received chastisement from a local social worker at

that site for helping someone not from Puerto Rico.] But he found a place to share a tiny room with another person who was having problems paying rent, and with his meager new check, he was able to find a bed inside, a bed with an actual mattress, no longer having to sit up in a chair on Staten Island or at the Staten Island Ferry terminal overnight, and now he has enough money with his begging to eat three real meals a day. He recently got much needed surgery on his legs which has alleviated his suffering. And he now has more than two good friends, in addition to me. Keep praying. The answer may not be as quick as

we want or desire, but God provides a way. Keep praying. But also recognize that our prayers may be answered by giving us a very doable task to accomplish just what we were praying for.

Yet the story still does not end there. I introduced him to my tiny congregation at the Church Center. He now attends daily mass, daily Eucharists, there regularly. Many of the staff there now know him, and they give him help when they can. And they are his new friends. He has friends. He has nice, good friends, Christian friends. What a friend we have in Jesus. Correct? What a good friend we have in Jesus.

It does seem to me that often the ‘hope of the poor is being taken away’ in spite of our prayers from the daily Morning Prayer service in our Book of Common Prayer, which many Anglicans pray each day, which say to God, “Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten; Nor the hope of the poor be taken away.”

So, what is our role as Anglicans, as Christians, what is our role for the poor and the oppressed?

Listen to what God is saying to us right now, to you, to me. And let us do what God gives us to do to help others. We may be the advocates others need. We may have the

resources others so desperately need. We may have the gifts and talents and time others need. Let us recognize that that sometimes quiet little voice within us that is the voice of God speaking to us through his only begotten Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, one God in three persons.

May God give us wisdom to hear the cries of the poor, the widowed, and the orphan. And may we become God's hands and arms and feet and legs and minds and hearts, and abilities, to relieve their misery. Let not the hope of the poor be taken away.

Amen.

Description: The poor widow represents many around us who have needs beyond their reach. They often cry out to us. May we be the listening ears and open hearts to help others who cannot help themselves.

Tags: Poor, widow, orphan, children, shelter, social, services, judges, security, job, regulation, unjust, listen, hearts, Jesus, Christ, God, pray, continuously, hands, feet, abilities, opportunities, homeless, beggar, church, friend, mass, Eucharist, talents, gifts, resources, medical, Holy Spirit