

The Parable of the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge

“Nevertheless, she persisted.”

This became the rallying cry in 2017 of the feminist movement in the United States, after Senator Elizabeth Warren was formally rebuked by the Majority Leader for ignoring Senate rules during the US Attorney General confirmation hearings. Senator McConnell read the vote from the Senate floor, “Senator Warren was giving a lengthy speech. She had appeared to violate the rule. She was warned. She was given an explanation. Nevertheless, she persisted.” (*The Washington Post*, February 8, 2017)

And that is how a catchphrase was born.

Valerie Schultz wrote in *America: the Jesuit Review of Faith & Culture*, “It is a phrase we women embrace because persistence is what we do...Isn't that our job? Throughout history, we have persisted in our quest for respect, for justice, for equal rights, for suffrage, for education, for enfranchisement, for recognition, for making our voices heard. In the face of violence, of opposition, of ridicule, of belittlement, even of jail time, nevertheless, we have persisted.” (*article: From the Gospels to Elizabeth Warren, women nevertheless persist, March 29, 2017, and the following examples are paraphrased*):

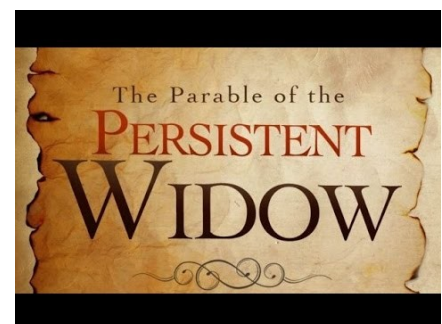
There are many examples of women in the Gospels who persevered and persisted: the unclean woman who bled for eighteen years without ceasing, shunned by society, yet she persisted in getting close enough to Jesus to touch the hem of his garment, believing in his healing powers. Jesus healed her because of her persistent faith. (*Matthew 9:20-22, Mark 5:24-34, Luke 8:43-48*)

In Matthew's Gospel (*15:21-28*) there is the Canaanite woman asking Jesus for her demon-possessed daughter's healing and she refused to take no for an answer. In the end, her persistence and faith got her what she wanted.

All four Gospel writers describe the women who persisted in following Jesus all the way to the foot of the cross, even after his own disciples abandoned him. Among them was his mother, Mary, who embodied what we mothers feel for our own children – persistent love. (*Matthew 27:55-56, Mark 15:40, Luke 23:49, John 19:25*)

And in today's reading we have yet another woman who persisted ~ for years!

The Parable of The Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge relates the story of a woman who refused to give up seeking justice. The widow had little to no social standing; she had no husband to plead on her behalf, she was poor, and, as a woman, she had no rights. She was completely vulnerable and could only appeal to the court for justice against her opponent. The judge was no paragon of virtue: he did not fear God and had no empathy or compassion for the widow. But he finally acted and delivered justice, not because he cared about the woman, but because he selfishly understood that this was the only way to get rid of her ~ she wore him out with her persistence.



God is totally different than the unjust judge; He is full of mercy and compassion, and there are several lessons we can learn from this parable:

- The widow was a stranger. We are the children of God. *(1 Peter 2:9-10)*
- She was only one and all alone. We are many as a part of the Family of God.
- She could only plead at a distance. We can draw near and come boldly. *(Hebrews 4:15-16)*
- She pleaded her own case. But we have an advocate who intercedes for us. *(Romans 8:26)*
- She had no promise of an answer. But we have the promise that God hears and answers our prayers. *(Luke 18:8)*
- She came to a court of law. We come to the throne of grace. *(Hebrews 4:16)*
- Her request provoked the judge. Our supplications delights God.
- The judge was unjust. But God is righteous.
- The judge was inattentive to the woman. But God is attentive to our requests.
- The judge had to be pressured. But God is naturally concerned.
- The judge was wearied by the woman's coming. But God is glad that we asked.
- The judge listened to the woman for the wrong reason. But God listens because we loves US. *(adapted from A Passage to Ponder, April 8, 2020, thepreachersword.com)*

Bookending the story of the persistent widow are Jesus' emphases on the importance of prayer and a question about faith. Prior to this story *(Luke 17:20-37)* Jesus had been preparing His disciples for the drastic changes that they were soon going to face: his arrest, trial, and crucifixion. He was preparing them for a life based on faith.

He prefaces today's parable with the main message that they, his disciples, "need to pray always and not to lose heart." *(1:1)* Not to lose heart ~ 'ekkakeo' in Biblical Greek, not to grow discouraged.

Jesus uses this parable to teach his disciples never to give up, that being persistent in prayer was important, even though the disciples would face harsh opposition, lose their motivation to pray, and become discouraged. Jesus knew that His future disciples ~ us ~ would also need this encouragement.

Dr. Gary Inrig, in his book *The Parables*, explores this further:

"The word "give up" describes the temptation to quit in despair when we are tired. Giving up is motivated by weariness that comes from living in a hostile world, feeling worn out by injustice,



mistreatment, misunderstanding, and personal failure. The cost of being a disciple tempts us to lose heart.” (pg. 152)

How do we keep going when we feel like bailing out? We can learn a great lesson from the life cycle of a fish, the salmon.

Salmon begin their lives in freshwater where they spend a few months to a few years, depending on the species, before they make their way downstream to the ocean. When it's time to spawn, they undertake an amazing journey in the fall, returning upstream to their natal stream, river, or lake, often battling rapids and strong currents. Salmon have the determination and perseverance to keep on going until they reach their final destination.

But, for many, “Swimming against the current is tiring – why not go with the flow? It is easier to float than to fight. How tempting it is to drift with the current morally, socially, ethically, or spiritually! How do the tough keep going? ~ by determination.” (*The Parables: Understanding What Jesus Meant* by Gary Inrig, pg.152, Discovery House Publishers, 1991)

Jesus was our model in persistent prayer. “Look at His life. He spent whole nights in prayer. That takes perseverance and incredible persistence. At the end of His life, he was...intensely praying...Jesus knew how to stand firm in persistent prayer.” (“*Standing Firm in Persistent Prayer,*” *crosswalk.com, February 10, 2014*)

He said, “*So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.*” (Luke 11:9-10, NRSV)

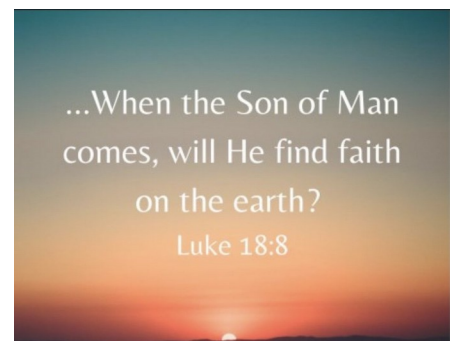
We can trust that God does hear every prayer, and He does answer, maybe just not right away. There is a wise saying that goes:

If the request is wrong, God says, "No." If the timing is wrong, God says, "Slow." If you are wrong, God says, "Grow." But if the request is right, the timing is right and you are right, God says, "Go!" (*Too Busy Not to Pray* by Bill Hybels, pg.74, IVP Books, 2008)

Perhaps he is teaching us patience and persistence, too, to grow in our faith. That may answer Jesus' question in verse 8: “...when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

In the book of Isaiah, it is written that our thoughts are not God's thoughts, nor are our ways God's ways. (55:8) We just don't have the ability to see what God sees. Let me share with you a wonderful poem that describes this reality.

The author of this writing is unknown, and the work is entitled, “I Asked For.”



I asked for strength and God gave me difficulties to make me strong.
I asked for wisdom and God gave me problems to solve.
I asked for prosperity and God gave me brawn and brains to work.

I asked for courage and God gave me dangers to overcome.
I asked for patience and God placed me in situations where I was forced to wait.
I asked for love and God gave me troubled people to help.
I asked for favours and God gave me opportunities.
I asked for everything so I could enjoy life.
Instead, he gave me life so I could enjoy everything.
I received nothing I wanted; I received everything I needed
My Prayer Has Been Answered. *(Author Unknown)*

Prayer flows out of faith; faith is built up through prayer. We are not to give in to discouragement or despair. The widow kept coming, she kept badgering, and she kept bothering. She persisted.

In the same way, may we be persistent in prayer and not lose heart.

Amen.