

Pentecost 22 – Wesley 9 & 10.30am – 16th October 2016

Theme: “Be persistent in Prayer”

Reading: Luke 18:1-8 “The persistent widow & the unjust judge”

Text: “Jesus told the disciples....always pray and do not give up.”

Introduction

The Gospel of Luke is full of parables and here is one that is unique to this Gospel. Also when we think we have Jesus figured out as a teacher, healer and a man of prayer he goes and tells a story like this. It is not hard to imagine those listening to this story throwing their heads back in laughter as this is a ridiculous tale – nonsensical in their society. A widow pounds and pounds on the door of a rotten judge who could not care less about her plight, yet he finally sticks his head out the window and in a sense shouts: “All right, knock it off! I will give you what you want if you will simply shut-up and stop annoying me! This will get you out of my face and I can continue my quiet existence.” The disciples laugh because they know that this woman, a widow, has nothing – no husband, no money, no social or political standing, no inheritance – and here she is standing up persistently against a powerful individual in that society. The situation is farcical. The woman has no hope, even against a rotten judge. Good story Jesus!! They laugh initially and then sigh as they remember that Jesus has told them that this is what prayer is like. Not easy, not always getting the results we want. It makes us think of us and others hammering away at God’s mythical door when there is huge need and the prayers prayed don’t seem answered. We are worn out by prayers seemingly unanswered. Yet here in this parable, Jesus assures the disciples that God will see that those who persevere will get justice and quickly. This doesn’t seem the reality for us, on occasions, so we need to look a little closer at this parable.

Middle

I must admit to struggling with this parable as I did with the parable of the ‘unjust steward’ just a few weeks ago. However in this parable I struggle with the dichotomy of answered and unanswered prayer, even though this is not specifically mentioned in the parable – only that God will be more charitable than the ‘unjust judge’. However there are a variety of aspects to reflect upon within this parable, so here goes!!

Let us focus on ‘*persistence*’ – not ours but God’s. One way to summarize the biblical message, the good news of the Old and New Testaments, is to speak of God’s persistent, unshakable, everlasting love for us and all God’s creation. God is so persistent in love for us, so unshakable, that we do learn that we can trust our God to bring about justice. We can be sure that God hears our prayers, our crying day and night, even though we may not perceive results as we had expected. God has not forgotten us. However, does the world we are in living in even come close to the world Christians have been praying for since Jesus’ first coming? As Fred Craddock puts it: “All we know in the life of prayer is asking, seeking, knocking and waiting, trust sometimes fainting, sometimes growing angry!”

It is here that the persistence of the faithful enters the picture. Because we know of and hopefully have experienced God’s persistent love in and through Christ, we try each day anew to persist in praying, ‘Thy kingdom come’. Praying for many is hard work, and is an interim between God’s promise and its fulfilment.

We look at the life of the church living between the first and second coming of Christ, and it is in this space that we pray keeping hope in what appears to be a hopeless world attempting to annihilate itself in a variety of ways, not the least being war and horrors inflicted between peoples. Praying means hopeful trusting in God.

A perfunctory or even non-existent prayer life of believers (communally as well as individually) may have many reasons; often at the core of it is faith that has lost trust. The widow kept coming to the judge, hoping against all odds, persistent, determined and relentless. She came from a position of no power to one who had power. Today believers keep praying not because we are 'good Christians, but because we have seen what God, through Christ has done for us. It is in response to God's persistence that we are called to be faithful in prayer both as a community and as individuals. We are strengthened through the gift of the Holy Spirit who gives us courage to pray without ceasing in a broken and fearful world.

This hopeful courage that the believers receive as a gift from the Holy Spirit leads not only to a meditative and introspective life of prayer but also to an active and 'extrospective' life of prayer as well, one that includes resistance against all forms of injustice.

Luise Schottroff underlines this thought emphatically in her interpretation of this parable. She writes:

"Praying and crying to God against injustices describes the whole life of believers: their efforts, their protests against injustice. It describes also their trust in God, for they know that God acts very differently from the unjust judge."

I believe that as a church, as a congregation, we need to build up our pastoral ministry so that when disaster strikes a family or an individual, we can offer the hope of Christ to our members even in their suffering. To me this is the crux of this parable and why it is given specifically to the disciples. They were the ones who were about to be the initial leaders of the early church. They needed to know the love of God through all the crises they were about to endure. This is still the message for us today. Our prayers need to be continual and based on persistence and trust in our God. A God who hears our prayers, who is there for the faithful and has already shown persistent love for the people – you and I. Out of this comes our faithfulness not only in prayer, but also the will to fight injustice in the world, even against the laughable odds of the widow seeking the unjust judge's help. Suddenly this parable comes alive in today's society, in the world you and I live in. A world often seen as devoid of faith, made up of people who say 'I don't care about God or about people' basically saying 'I'm here to get what I can for the now.' Into that we are called to faithfully, persistently pray and put forward God's love for all and seek justice for the marginalised.

Conclusion

It so happens that this week is Anti-Poverty Week and you may well ask: "What can we do?" Well believe it or not, you can pray and use a little resource that has been prepared for this week to guide your praying. This is a local Anglican/Uniting publication that calls us to pray each day this coming week looking at:

- Housing-homelessness
- Domestic violence
- Emergency relief
- Young people disengaging from education
- Disability
- Youth unemployment
- Drug and Alcohol Abuse

The booklet has information about each topic and then follows a praise point, a prayer point and an action point.

Remember: Always pray and do not give up. You never know what may happen! Amen.