

Prayer is Relationship  
Luke 18:1-8  
The Widow and the Unjust Judge  
St. Peter's, Hillsdale  
October 19, 2025  
Proper 24 Year C  
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May the God who creates us, redeems us, and sustains us, be with us this day, and remain with us always.

Jesus says in this parable that we should pray always and not lose heart, that we should pray without ceasing. I have to say in my own life there has probably been more ceasing than praying. Yet what I also know is that prayer is water that drips upon my parched soul, gradually, persistently, hydrating and renewing.

I think about the unjust judge, a man described as neither fearing God, nor respecting people. Not exactly who you want in charge of a judicial system. Then we turn to the widow. The one we are told who seeks justice. I have an image in my mind's eye of these two characters, maybe you do too?

I'm seeing the judge as a white man, bespectacled, with some girth around his waist, round face to match and male-patterned baldness, in his mid to late 50s. He is well dressed. People would prefer to ignore him, because he is kind of pompous, but since he has some wealth and some power, folks are polite and appear to listen when he talks.

I'm seeing the woman as gray haired, neatly dressed in clothes of faded colors and dated styles. She's got a walking stick, a slight stoop, and sharp eyes that stare unrelentingly. Most folks get out of her way, because her intensity is more than many can manage. When she encounters a child the ones who don't duck and scurry, those who stay put when she gaits past, they are almost always the recipient of a bunch of grapes, a beautiful orange, or a heel of bread.

These are my images of these mythical characters, jousting in this parable. I'm rooting for the woman, but I understand the man's annoyance. As the story unfolds, I find myself smiling as the Judge eventually just gives in and gives the widow what she wants. He wants her noise over. She is like an unrelenting dog barking outside, insistent and annoying

Then as I reflect, I make the initial mistake of thinking that Jesus is telling me in order for God to answer my prayers I need to get a walking stick and continually bang on God's door so my prayers will be answered. If I do that, eventually God will say, "yes." Mostly, so God can get on with addressing the pressing needs of our world's insanity.

But that's not what Jesus is getting at. Shocking that I missed it the first time. Jesus offering this tableau of argument, doesn't want me to see God as the inscrutable, oblivious, otherwise occupied judge, but rather as the exact opposite. If the judge can do good, and he is a first-class *schmuck*, how much more good will God do for all of us who cry out?

God is so much more good.

I get it. Yet. Anyone of us who asks for divine intervention has in our experience a sense of disappointment and sometimes despair, when our prayers feel like basketballs tossed in the air, falling flat coming nowhere near the net of God's response.

What does this mean? What does this parable have to do with me and you? Who have no doubt prayed and prayed and have felt ignored and abandoned?

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This is what I have to offer.

Perhaps, prayer is not an act or a singular request. But rather perhaps prayer is a continual state of being. Perhaps it is nothing like the determined woman pounding on the door, (Which bums me out, because I know how to be the determined woman who gets stuff done.) Maybe prayer is as Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel says,

*Prayer is our attachment to the utmost. Without God in sight we are like the scattered rungs of a broken ladder. Prayer is our humble answer to the inconceivable surprise of living. It is all we can offer in return for the mystery by which we live.*

*Prayer teaches us what to aspire for. So often we do not know what to cling to. Prayer implants in us the ideals we ought to cherish.*

*Prayer is no panacea, no substitute for action. It is rather, like a beam thrown from a flashlight before us into darkness.*

*It is the light that we who grope, stumble, and climb, discover where we stand, what surrounds us, and the course which we should choose.*

*Prayer makes visible the right and reveals the false. In its radiance we behold the worth of our efforts, the range of our hopes and the meaning of our deeds.*

*Envy and fear, despair and resentment, anguish and grief, which lie heavy upon the heart are dispelled like shadows by its light.*

*The purpose of prayer is to be brought to God's attention, to be listened to, to be understood by [God] Him; not to know [God] Him, but to be known to [God] Him...*

*Prayer is an invitation to God to intervene in our lives to let His will prevail in our affairs; it is an effort to make God the Lord of our soul.*

So says Rabbi Heschel.

I believe Prayer is not so much about petition but rather connecting. Prayer is our relationship with the Holy.

The unjust judge and the widow had a finite relationship, a call and response courtship. May we who long for the Holy, open ourselves to seek continually, moment by moment, a life-long, yearning for Divine love.

This is my hope. This is my prayer.  
Amen.