**Luke 18:1-8**

 And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. **2** He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. **3** And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ **4** For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, **5** yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’ ” **6** And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. **7** And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? **8** I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

**“Lift Up Your Hearts”**

 “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (Galatians 1:3-5). You cannot miss the value of prayer. Today’s parable places it at the forefront for a Christian life. St. Luke tells us, “And (Jesus) told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.” We know a whole section in the Small Catechism deals with prayer and more specifically the Lord’s Prayer. Acts 2 even points out how early Christians, “… devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

 Of course, if prayer is pleasing to God and needed for a Christian life, certainly it will fall under attack. So for instance, some run off to imagine prayer to be a means for prosperity if they only pray hard enough. Others might quickly turn prayer into more of a “self-talk” cutting themselves off from what God says by His Word. Still others today, can slide off into making prayer into something like a magical enchantment used to wards of evil spirits. Sadly, those who are just plain dead to prayer open themselves up to every kind of attack by the Devil. Regardless the deceptions, our parable today brings every kind of encouragement. Lift up your hearts and pray for God’s justice comes to us in Jesus.

1. **What comes upon disciples of Jesus will bring every kind of question, fear, and distress.**
2. This parable arises for a very precise reason.
* The Pharisees had just asked Jesus about, “when the kingdom of God would come.”
* His answer described the glorious return of the Son of Man, but not before first having to deal with His humiliation and death.
* This is what makes the parable of the persistent widow so important for His disciples to not lose heart.
* Everything appeared to be against this widow, an adversary brought injustice to her life, and above all, here was a judge who refused to act.

1. How tempting is it to lose heart and not pray in these later days with what we face?
* The kingdom of God has yet to come in glory, even as we continue to pray, “Thy kingdom come” but maybe now it is more with one eye open.
* Like the widow, shouts of “give me justice” cry out over the corruption of marriage, domestic violence, murder of the unborn, objectifying of women, unfit leaders, and how sound teaching of Scripture no longer satisfies itching ears.
* Our unbelieving culture takes offense at any church praying to God only in Jesus, but leaves no room for the other religions to have a say.
* Yet, even praying on its own accord wears down our hearts, since the answer and timing by God can appear as if He is against us!
1. **Christ comes to strengthen faith in the promising justice of God that does not fail.**
2. The widow prevails in this parable simply because she was persistent.
* It was neither about the justice of the matter that changed anything or how the judge became different a person.
* All we hear is the unjust judge state, “I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.”
* Certainly, this widow is praise worthy better than a pro-boxer, but Jesus knows such persistence for prayer comes only by faith.
* So the Lord changes the focus to say, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?”
1. Persistence in prayer overflows simply because of an even more persistent promise in God.
* If a widow wins over an unjust judge, how much more will God answer any that by repentance and faith calls upon His justice.
* Only those that have suffered see the need for justice and why after Israel went into exile, the remnant still held God to His Word saying, “Let not the downtrodden turn back in shame; let the poor and needy praise your name.” (Introit)
* By His suffering and death, the disciples had to take the unjust ways of a sinful world and hear the justice of God say three days later, “Peace be with you!”
* God’s justice makes prayer more about saying to Him what He already says to us for, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness…”
1. **God’s justice at last comes to justify so sinners can pray in Jesus’ Name.**
2. As much as the widow was persistent, the disciples would see the persistence of their Lord.
* God’s promise was good for Jesus concluded the parable saying, “I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily.”
* This is what the disciples witnessed when Jesus was drawing closer to the cross for His praying did not decrease but increased.
* Jesus warned His disciples to stay awake against the adversary, the Devil, but while they slept, He prayed with drops of blood.
* When judgment poured on Jesus with none standing with Him, God’s Son prayed over the justice won for sinners saying, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”
1. We are far better off than the widow who persisted against such injustice.
* Rather than being alone, baptism joins us to righteousness of Jesus, which means nothing keeps you from calling upon God in the day of trouble. (thief on cross)
* Prayer needs persistence, but there is no hidden strength in sinners only Jesus continuing to serve us by His Word so faith lives in Him.
* If the widow says, “give me justice.” Our prayer goes farther to say, “Give me Jesus!” which is why our prayers only increases at the Lord’s Supper.
* Since salvation is a gift, prayer looks to no other rest than the same grace that is good and sufficient for our needs in life.
* Luther gives the example, “I have lived as I could, but I pray Thee, do not take my life and actions into consideration but Thy mercy and goodness, promised through Christ, and give me what I ask for His sake” (Plass 1077:3436).

 God takes pleasure for us to call upon Him. The vital question raised by Jesus was not about prayer, but “will he find faith on earth?” This is not any old faith in God where all religions are praying from different sides of the same mountain. It is the saving faith that has come from God’s justifying work alone in Jesus. This remains in His Church, where the faithful pray knowing of God’s faithful promises that stand before them. These gray and later days have all kinds of trouble, but God is not late in terms of justice. Instead, this righteous judge has been rendering out His greatest judgment for all to receive in a sinful world. Lift up your hearts and pray for God’s justice comes to us in Jesus. Amen. Now the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.