

ACTIVE PRAYER LUKE 18:1-8

PENTECOST 19 SUNDAY, 10/19/25

ST. JAMES FF, MN

Let us pray: Loving and patient God: May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my Rock, and my Redeemer. Amen!

Friends and Family in Christ: Grace and peace to you this morning, from God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ; the great Shepherd of the sheep.

In the 1985 film, “Out of Africa” which co-starred Meryl Streep and the late Robert Redford, we are introduced to the character by the name of Baroness Karen Blixen, played by Meryl Streep. As the story goes, she lived in Kenya as an owner of a large coffee plantation.

The Kikuyu tribe, who inhabited the land on part of the plantation became a big part of her life. She loved them. She cared for them. She worked toward their education. But as a result of the First World War, she experienced serious financial stress, which led to the loss of the plantation and the land on which the Kikuyu lived.

The new land owner was not concerned about anything but the land, eventually forcing the Kikuyu to relocate. She didn’t have the money to buy the land back, so she pleaded with various government officials to assist her in fighting back and preserving the land for the Kikuyu to live, but her efforts were unsuccessful, UNTIL.

Eventually she attended the reception for the new Governor of Kenya. Ignoring all protocol to the embarrassment of the others who attended the soiree, she moved her way into the governor’s presence, fell on her knees and grabbed the governor’s hand as she pleaded for the Kikuyu people. Others tried to lift her from the floor, when she pled for the governor to give her his word that he would address the situation. It was then that the Governor’s wife stood up and stated, “You have my word.” Karen Blixen’s persistence paid off. The Governor responded to her request preserving the land for the people she had grown to love and cherish.

Just prior to our gospel lesson for today, we find Jesus encouraging His disciples and followers to continue praying, especially when immediate answers are not forthcoming. For the first readers of this gospel, who by that time, were under the constant threat of persecution from their own countrymen and from the Roman authorities, the thought of persistence in prayer may have rung a bit hollow, because they were praying and yet the situation was getting better, and continuing deteriorate, as they awaited the return of Jesus to confront injustice and to set the world right once again.

For those of us living in the 21st century, we are also encouraged to continue to pray for challenges in our own personal lives, or the lives of our faith communities, as well as how to navigate our culture in such divisive times, longing for injustice, suffering, and oppression to be addressed with firm compassion.

As we look at this text, we need to acknowledge that the Judge in the parable does NOT represent God. In fact, God is the opposite of the unscrupulous judge. And the primary difference is God's love. God invites us to continue to bring our needs to Him repeatedly, even though we may at times wrongly assume that God may be irritated with us for continuing to bring up the same issues in our prayer life time and time again. One of the things that this parable reminds us is that God welcomes our conversation with Him through prayer, even if we find ourselves repeating many of the same requests. God not only tolerates our repetitive prayers, but He encourages us to continue doing so because He loves us and His desire is for our relationship with Him to deepen and grow, and He loves to respond to our petitions with what is best for us.

This brings up the challenge between God's timing and our impatience with God's timing. This issue is where our faith is put to the test. All of you here this morning and watching on Facebook Live have experienced praying for a person or an issue for a long period of time, without any apparent resolution. In those moments, we cannot understand why God has yet to respond with the answer which we so desperately seek. I can think of two instances in my 70 years, where continual prayers for people I care about were not answered in the way I had hoped. Yet as I reflect in hindsight, I do see answers to these prayers which were unexpected. I did not see the healing which I had hoped for, but I saw something else; a relative who despite her mental health challenges, loved unconditionally when she was

able and as her son said at her funeral, she showed us how to die with dignity and grace. In the other instance, the challenges are ongoing, but I am pleased to report that through the health challenges experienced in my own family, our relationships with each other have deepened, and our trust in God is beginning to trust and be grateful to God for the unexpected positive answers.

From God's perspective, think of the timing of His responses to our prayers in this way. As parents and grandparents, we are very familiar with being asked by our kids to give permission to participate in activities, we know that they are not prepared to be responsible for, or we are asked to provide a new item of interest, that we know they do not have the maturity as of yet, to possess. When we say "No" to the request, we are often met with accusations that we don't trust them, or that they are more mature and responsible than we think they are.

So it is with God. Perhaps, we may not be ready for the answers we expect, or there are other factors unrelated to our readiness that God's Spirit is in the process of working through. Be that as it may, although we may chafe impatiently while we await a response from God, we are assured that our prayers have been heard, and that God will answer with the appropriate answer when the time is right.

The first two points, I just described; persistence in prayer, and the unpredictable timing of God's responses are fairly easy to discuss. The third offers more of a challenge for us to consider.

The question we need to ponder as we consider persistence in prayer is are we willing to be part of the solution for the prayers which we offer to God? Do we understand that prayer is not only bringing our requests to God, but also being open to His leading in terms of how we might be part of the solution. Prayer inevitably leads to action. In fact it is action. We pray, and then we act in response to the Spirit's leading.

A heartbreaking issue within our country is the normalization of one mass shooting after another, involving mentally unstable persons with access to military grade assault weapons. So often, after another shooting occurs, politicians and leaders from both sides of the aisle, offer thoughts and prayers to the victims and their families, but lack the will to begin to address the multi-faceted problem involving the death of innocent children and adults. One commentator offered the following

chilling comment; “If all that we can offer in the aftermath of these tragedies is our thoughts and prayers without addressing the multi faceted root causes of the problem, then our prayers are meaningless.”

Please do not assume, that I am lumping legal hunting in with those who have access to military assault weapons. For I have found that hunters generally have a high degree of integrity and treat firearms with respect and are very safety conscious. But the question still remains. Are we willing to respond to the Spirit’s leading as we continue to bring our requests to God? Are we willing to accompany a family member or friend who is battling a terminal illness? Are we willing to speak up in defense of those who have no one to speak up for them? Are we willing to speak to the issues of the day regarding injustice, self-centeredness, and the like with humility and compassion, even if it may come with a cost and it usually does? These are hard questions, but I firmly believe as Scripture teaches that walking by faith is hard and costly, as G.K. Chesterton once wrote, “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried.” God does not promise smooth sailing, but He does promise that He will guide our ship of life, according to His will and purpose.

Finally, I want to reassure you of God’s love for you when you respond to the prodding’s of the Holy Spirit, and when you look the other way. Prayer is a wonderful gift we have been given, to speak freely with a holy God; who invites us to share our frustrations and even false accusations against the almighty (all you have to do here is read the Psalms), along with thanking Him for His faithfulness in the past and anticipated faithfulness in the present and future. But in addition, God promises to grant us the courage to say and do what is right and what is needed in challenging situations. He does not leave us on an island to face the criticism and hostility on our own. He invites His Spirit into our circumstances who grants us the courage to act and grants us the words to speak when needed. May God lead each of us in our present and our future according to His will and purpose as we continue to dialogue with Him in and through prayers of persistence. Thanks be to God! Amen!