

**October 20, 2019      “Will Jesus find us faithful?”    Luke 18:1--8**

**Abraham wasn’t afraid to confront God. He had a sense of what needed to be done and took it up with God. When he interceded on behalf of Sodom, he got God to agree to the bare minimum of faithful persons before agreeing to let God cast judgment. The point isn’t whether Abraham’s intervention proved successful – remember that once Lot’s family exited not even one righteous person could be found or whether we approve of this account of God’s judgment. The point is simply this – Abraham was persistent in his engagement with God. He was respectful, but he also was willing to push God.**

**If we step back into the 17th chapter of Luke, we find him speaking of the nature of God’s realm. He speaks of the nature of faith and of gratitude. When it came to nailing down when and where this realm would emerge, Jesus seems rather coy. It’s not coming in a way that can be easily observed. It won’t come with the typical institutional forms. It will lack thrones and palaces and**

**guards. In fact, “the kingdom of God is among you” it would seem that if one has the faith the size of the mustard seed, then one is prepared to tap into this realm that is God’s. Why?**

**It’s because God is faithful, not because we have some inherent power of our own to affect such things. That is the way of the kingdom – it is the work of God that we’ve been invited to participate in. The question is – are we willing to engage with God till the end? Will Jesus find us faithful? That is, will we be continuous in our prayers –continuous in our engagement with the living God?**

**As he often does, Jesus tells us a story – a parable – that speaks to this question. In the parable of the unjust judge we encounter a person who doesn’t fear God. That is, this judge, this leader of the community, has no sense of God’s majesty. He is, you might say, his own god. He makes his own rules and administers them in ways that suits his own welfare. Even though he holds a**

**position that requires wisdom, he's not a person of wisdom. He is, however, pragmatic.**

**He's pragmatic in his realization that he won't get any peace until he gives this woman, who comes to him continuously seeking justice, what she desires. She's not easily deterred. She keeps knocking. She keeps holding vigil. In other words, she's made herself a pest. And so, he gives her what she asks for, simply to get rid of her.**

**Have you had someone like that, or have you been that person? Like a child in the store persistent on getting a toy or candy, they just don't stop. Or a teenager wanting to borrow the car, not giving up or shutting up till they get their way. Or an adult daughter Christmas shopping with her mom and sister; Patti and I having fun at mom's expense, were going up and down aisles at Carson's calling "Mommy, Mommy, where is my Mommy?" When we did catch up with her, she's telling people around her laughing, "I don't know these two, they are not mine". Then I found this gold stuffed**

Santa Claus on sale for \$10. So, we are in the checkout line, there's a young man behind the register working, I start tugging on mom's coat; Mom, mom, mom can I get this? Patti is laughing, I think mom was getting a little uptight about it, but when got to the register the young man said to her; "you can't take them anywhere, I have the same problem with my girls". My mom lost it, laughing she grab the Santa from me, paid for it and told the young man "Merry Christmas. Every year we would go Christmas shopping she would bring this up and I was told to behave myself or she would leave me in the car. This really doesn't have anything to due with today, but it did bring this memory of my mom up.

When we hear stories like this parable or the judge and the persistent woman, we're tempted to jump to the conclusion that the person in authority is God. If we're to understand the message, we'd better let Jesus finish the story.

The unjust judge gives way to the woman because of her persistence – just to get her off his back. But God isn't like this

**judge. God isn't unpredictable and self-absorbed. Prayer isn't the same thing as Sheldon knocking on Penny's door until she answers.**  
**I am sure you have seen this commercial. Prayer isn't making oneself a pest. That's because God is unlike the judge. God isn't slow to answer and provide justice to those who call out. You might be wondering if this is true, but perhaps we don't have a good gauge on what God considers quick. Whatever the case – God is faithful to God's promises. God has made a covenant and remains true to it.**

**Jesus invites us to be persistent in our prayers – not because God is disinclined to answer us unless we make a lot of noise – but because this is his definition of faithfulness. If God is faithful, then shouldn't we also be faithful?**

**There is in this discussion of prayer an element needing to be highlighted. The woman goes to the judge seeking justice. She has been wronged and seeks redress. Although Jesus doesn't address this question directly, it is clear that Jesus is concerned about justice. To be faithful in our prayers, we must be faithful in our**

**horizontal relationships. Justice is about attending to the command to love one's neighbor. As the first letter of John reminds us – how can we say we love God, whom we can't see, if we don't love our brother or sister, whom we can see. Now we can take this in a very narrow way and simply apply it to family or fellow Christians, but I sense that this is far too narrow. Remember that God loves the world.**

**I affirm the Protestant principle that it's faith not works that justifies, but a faith that expresses itself in a form that the unjust judge would recognize as his own, doesn't seem to fit with the kind of faith Jesus expresses. To be persistent in our relationship with the living God will lead to a change in the way we view each other and live with each other. We do good works not to prove ourselves worthy of God's love. We do them because they are expression of a relationship that is persistent – in season and out of season. So, will Jesus find us to be faithful?**

**It is just that simple, it is just that hard!**