St. John's Tappahannock
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Luke 18:1-8

Jesus told his disciples a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, `Grant me justice against my opponent.' For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, `Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Sermon

In today's gospel, Jesus continues to teach his disciples. By chapter 18 in Luke, he is approaching Jerusalem, and he is preparing his disciples to live in a world between his death and resurrection, and the parousia. (The parousia refers to the end times when the time Jesus Christ will

return to judge humanity at the end of the world, and bring in God's kingdom. This will be a new way of social, economic, and political relationships in society built around living peacefully together, where justice prevails).

Most scholars agree that the gospel of Luke was written around 80 CE, So the disciples listening to Lukan texts saw or heard about what they may have interpreted as signs of the end times, like the destruction of Jerusalem (70 CE), Nero's persecution (54-68 CE) and the explosion of Vesuvius (79 CE). So they often wondered, when will the arrival of God's kingdom on earth be? Jesus never gives them a timeline, and instead, helps them and us to live in the in-between times.

We know that Jesus' teachings are a road map of how to love mercy, do justice and walk humbly with our God (Micah 6). We do this by allowing the Kingdom of God to live in our hearts, while waiting for the Parousia.

The story of the unjust judge is a parable. By the end of the short story, we know that this judge's nature is the opposite of God's nature. Jesus often uses opposites to bring clarity to correct understanding, and uses familiar characters. The archetype of the widow refers to a woman whose male agency in a patriarchal society has been stripped away. There is no husband or father or brother or other male figure in her life to represent her. She has no choice but to persist and persist and is finally given her

request, simply to stop her behavior which was bothersome to the unjust judge. So Jesus ends with the reassuring statement, *"Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them."*

So the message is if the persistent pleading of the helpless widow triumphs over an unjust judge, how much more will the persistent praying of Christian disciples achieve; if an unjust judge yields to the entreaties of the widow, how much more will a gracious God do for those who persist in prayer.

'Waiting for the parousia', is not difficult for the disciples when the days are bright and cheery, but they despair in times of difficulty as members of a persecuted community.

The Jerome Commentary suggests that the question at the end of the scripture suggests the following: the decisive question is not about God's vindication of God's chosen and persecuted community; God *will* vindicate them. The question is whether the disciples will remain faithful to him during the long haul.

Another parable in Luke illustrates the same message about perseverance in prayer.

Luke 11:5-9

5 And he said to them, ‘Suppose one of you has a
friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him,
“Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; 6 for a friend of
mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before
him.” 7 And he answers from within, “Do not bother me; the
door has already been locked, and my children are with
me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.” 8 I tell
you, even though he will not get up and give him anything
because he is his friend, at least because of his
persistence he will get up and give him whatever he
needs.

9 ‘So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you;
seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened
for you.’

This lovely scripture says in a poetic way the same simple yet serious encouragement from today’s gospel: *pray always and do not lose heart.*

We modern Christians face the same dilemma, don’t we. We look over the last 100 years of human history and can become very depressed at our failures to bring in God’s kingdom on a large scale. Yet we too can live during the in- between times by being mindful and prayerful and living out our deepest dreams for ourselves. God gave us

each gifts of personality and He joys in the ways we express them.

Irenaeus, 2nd century theologian, wrote "…the glory of God is a human being fully alive." Let's look at a few examples.

There is a famous 1981 movie called Chariots of Fire, which won best picture, in which Scottish runner Eric Liddell, won the 1924 Olympics 400 meter gold medal. One of my favorite lines in the film is when Liddell is running swiftly on the beach. He says to a friend when finished, "God made me [run] fast, and when I run, I feel his pleasure".

Or how about Dodger's game 4 performance against the Brewers by pitcher Shohei Ohtani 2 nights ago – 10 strikeouts, and 3 homeruns! One was a leadoff homerun, and the next sailed out over the stadium! Some say that was the best performance of any baseball player ever, helping to win the National League pennant and paving the way to the World Series. What a way to pull out of a slump!

Then there is Psalm 104: 24-26, 31,33, a song of celebration of all living creatures!

O Lord, how manifold are your works!
    In wisdom you have made them all;
    the earth is full of your creatures.
25 Yonder is the sea, great and wide,

creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.
26 There go the ships,
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in [the deep].

May the glory of the Lord endure forever;
may the Lord rejoice in his works—

I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.

So stay centered by staying active in the pursuits that give you great joy. And live a life that gives glory to our creator because you are using your God given gifts and talents and not letting them lie fallow.

So how do we do this when we are constantly barraged with negativity? How will we remain faithful to Jesus for the long haul? The answer is also in Luke.

Luke 17:20-21 - Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; 21 nor will they say, [a]‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is [b]within you.”

That is not something we hear very often in the New Testament…the concept of our inner life with God. The non-canonical Gospel of Thomas is comprised of 114 sayings of Jesus, some of which appear in the New

Testament. The following saying is very similar to what we just read Luke 17.

A portion of saying 3*: "… the kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will realize that it is you who are the children of the living God.*

Another translation is perhaps clearer to us:

If you bring forth what is within you, you will become children of God.

If you do not bring forth what is within you, will be become poverty of spirit.

This is a tough message to understand. We have to strive for the first, because we can. God says it is up to us. We need to make the choice of staying overwhelmed or mustering up the energy to bring forth our God given gifts of personality in all circumstances to glorify Him.

I am reminded of the first Beatitude: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

The reason the poor in spirit are blessed is that they will turn to God; for we each know, sometimes when all else has failed, there is nowhere else to turn. And that is when we dig the well of our soul a little deeper. And that is when we are filled with the peace which passes all understanding. And God will remind us that if we focus on

the Kingdom of heaven within, we will eventually perceive the message we need to hear. And in the meantime, we will have the patience and endurance we need.

Certainly in this way we can begin to bring forth our insights from our heart of hearts in Jesus Christ, and even be a spiritual presence to others…i.e., peacemakers. Blessed are the peacemakers for they will become the children of God (Matt 5:9). Whatever we do that brings peace about, is connected to this same Kingdom of God within.

So if we are troubled because we are living in challenging times, we should not give up the things that give us passion for life. Whether it be running, or baseball or immersing ourselves into nature, or being a home chef, or an artist or a gardener or a golfer – these things keep us connected to God, ourselves, and others and to the Holy and Creative Spirit of Joy.

Let us remember that God knows and loves each of us, knows exactly what we are going through, and listens to our prayers. Sometimes the answers to our prayers take a long time to manifest. Even so we should pray always and not lose heart. In this way, God will know we are faithful disciples who are in it for long haul.

Let it be so.

Sources

1. Raymond E. Brown of Union Theological Seminary, NYC; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J. (emeritus) of Catholic University of America Washington, DC; Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm. (emeritus) of The Divinity School of Duke University, Durhan, NC; Editors; The New Jerome Biblical Commentary; Prentice Hall; Upper Saddle Brook, NJ 07458; p. 710
2. Lambdin, Thomas Odin; Coptic Gospel of Thomas; Nag Hammadi Library (online); Saying 3