

“The Righteous Judge Hears Your Prayer”

Luke 18:1-8

In the first part of our Gospel reading, we hear words of Jesus that would be very confusing if we didn't have the rest of the Gospel as context. The character in the parable of the Unrighteous Judge that corresponds to God is the unrighteous judge. God is not an unrighteous judge.

In the parable, the judge does not fear God, that is, he has no respect for God's will and Law. Likewise, he has no respect for people. Keeping your honor and not suffering shame was a big deal in the ancient world. This judge, it seems, is not concerned if people are brought to shame. He has no respect for them. He has no respect for real justice.

The woman, the widow keeps coming to him begging, “Give me justice against my adversary.” He refused again and again, but in order to make her be quiet; to make her quit bothering him, he gives her justice. He justifies her.

Jesus is not setting up a model for how we should act. Jesus is teaching His disciples how to pray. This is following up what He has already taught them. In Luke 11, the disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray.” And He gives them the Lord's Prayer.

And then He tells them a parable about a friend who comes your door at midnight asking to borrow 3 loaves of bread because a visitor has arrived on a journey and it would be very shameful to have no food to offer him.

And you say, “My children and I are already in bed, I can’t get up and get you anything.” But he keeps knocking. You will not get up and get the bread for him because he is your friend, but you will get up and give him what he needs so that he quits bothering you.

This is where Jesus says, “Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. . . What Father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead give him a snake; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

When Jesus teaches about prayer, check out the Lord’s Prayer – daily bread is the only physical comfort. But don’t be afraid to ask for more. Open your catechism and see all the things Luther says are part of daily bread: “Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.”

You like giving good gifts to your children, so does your Father in heaven. But you don’t give your children everything they ask for (and for good reason), and neither does your Father in heaven. And unlike a sinful father like me, your Father in heaven always knows exactly what good

things you need and exactly what obstacles and challenges you need so that He may “give justice to His elect.”

Be persistent in prayer, just like the woman who kept bothering the judge. But know what you are praying for. We are not just praying for stuff. We pray that God’s name remains holy among us. We pray that God’s kingdom would come. We pray that forgiveness would come. We pray that temptation would go away. We pray that evil would go away.

The woman kept bothering the unrighteous judge. She wanted justice. She wants justification. She wants to be declared righteous, but she has an adversary accusing her.

This is our story. Satan accuses you again and again that you have broken God’s Law. And he knows you have broken God’s Law because he tempted you to do it in the first place. There is only One who has the authority to justify you, to declare you righteous.

Jesus says, “If an unrighteous judge who does not fear God or respect man will grant justice to a widow because she is bothering him, how much more will your Father in heaven cover you with mercy and grace? Will not God give justice to His elect who cry out to Him day and night? Of course He will.

We have a righteous judge; a justifying judge. We have a judge who is described again and again as being slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He showers His grace upon you, but do not look at God’s grace as being a commodity. Grace is not a substance that we catch in our cups and once we are filled up enough, then we are ready for heaven.

Grace is not a substance that you receive from God. Grace is the reality that God is kindly, benevolently, graciously disposed toward you. God has a loving opinion about you that is a much higher opinion than you deserve. This called mercy; compassion.

We gather to hear God's Word and receive the sacraments – these are the Means of Grace. It is through these means that God proclaims His grace upon you. I am privileged to participate in the body and blood of Christ three times each weekend. This does not mean that I have three times as much grace as you. Grace is not a substance. In His Word and Sacrament, His friendly, kind, benevolent, loving disposition toward you is preached and proclaimed and made obvious.

He has promised, as the Righteous Judge, you are justified. You are declared righteous in His sight. You are “in Christ” and have been clothed with the righteousness of Christ. This grace has created faith in you and has saved you, and has caused you to trust in this promise of grace – which is why we come back again and again to hear this Word. Not to get MORE grace, but to hear about how God is disposed toward you, because that grace found in God's Word has caused you to believe and restores you and regenerates you, makes you alive. This is the work of the Righteous Judge who has a loving opinion of you and He promises to hear your prayer. Amen.