

Persist

20 10 13

Grant, we beseech you, merciful Lord,
to your faithful people pardon and peace,
that they may be cleansed from all their sins
and serve you with a quiet mind.

Our text today may be found in Luke's gospel, chapter 18 and verse 3:

'In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying,
"Grant me justice against my opponent."'

How persistent are you ? Do you give up when the going gets tough ? Or are you tough by nature, a really determined character who wants to succeed in what you set out to do ?

Today's parable from Luke's gospel, 'The Parable of the Unjust Judge' is the story of a woman who won't take no for an answer, a widow who is determined to get justice from a judge who seems totally uninterested in her case !

We don't know the name of the man or the name of the woman or what the city is called where the action is taking place. Clever that because it makes it universal, relevant to us no matter who we are or where we might be. We do know the man is a judge and we do know the woman is a widow: i.e. we know her husband is dead but we don't know whether or not she has sons and daughters who are alive

and living nearby. But she seems alone, trying to get justice from a judge who doesn't seem that interested in her case.

But we do get an insight into the characters of the two.

The judge is not a nice man. By our standards, by Christian standards, he seems a bad man, probably a very bad man. The phrase Luke uses of him is very telling: he **'neither feared God nor had respect for people.'** **'Fear'** is an old-fashioned word for 'respect' and respect means to accept that someone or something has value in your eyes and to show by how you behave that this is what you truly think. So the judge 'dises' (disrespects) God and 'dises' people in general. Sad man because this is the reverse of the values that Jesus taught were the twin pillars on which to build our lives: the love of God and the love of our neighbour as we love ourselves.

The widow seems like an honest woman in difficult circumstances. We don't know what her problem is but there is the mention of an opponent from whom she is seeking justice. Perhaps it is a case of money owed, of money that she desperately needs to pay for the necessities of life like food to eat and clothes to wear. Who knows ? But we do know there is a problem. And we do know that she won't give up. She keeps coming to the judge to ask for justice and because she is persistent, because she won't give up, she gets what she wants in the end.

The parable is a nice illustration of our need to persist and I trust you are suitably encouraged to do so. But instead of being a general message to persist in what

we do, Jesus is teaching something quite specific here and it is our need to be persistent in prayer. Prayer is simply talking to God, listening to God, being still in the presence of God. Sometimes, we want to praise God for whom and for what he is. Sometimes, we may want to say sorry to God for when we mess things up. Sometimes, we may want to thank God for what we have received. Sometimes, we may want to ask for things, for ourselves and for others. And Jesus is encouraging us not to give up, to be constant and faithful in prayer. Jesus shows us that if an unjust judge who is not nice, not good, will do the right thing simply because the widow won't leave him alone, then how much more will God not want to answer our prayers because he loves us and we are trying to be faithful to him.

But there is a problem: we can't just ask for anything – we need to ask for what is right, to ask for what is just. So suppose you want to do well in a test or an exam or be good at sport or music or dancing: God could grant your prayer but you may also need to invest the time and the effort necessary to succeed !

So the teaching today is clear: persist in what is right; especially persist in prayer; be persistent in praying for the right things and God who is listening will grant our prayer – though I have to say it may not be the answer we wanted !

That's good; that's nice; that's encouraging; but there is an uncomfortable question at the end of the passage from today's gospel: **'And yet when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth ?'**

I hope so; I pray so; do you ?

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Parish Eucharist

St Mary the Virgin and All Saints, Potters Bar

20th October, 2013

G: Sermons 28 : Persist

