

Sermon 2007 Proper 24 (Pentecost 21)
Text: Luke 18:1-8
Theme: "Why Pray?"

God will be God and there's nothing I can do about it.

That's one way of dealing with God. Why bother praying because he's going to do what he wants anyway. Or, here's another way to deal with him. Maybe I can get enough people to pray for the same thing and get God to do what I want! If every one of you prays that a hot tub might magically appear in my yard, then maybe it will happen right? But then if God can be manipulated by human beings, do we really want him being God?

In our text, Jesus compares his father to the unrighteous judge. We have a widow, the absolute embodiment of powerlessness. A widow could not even inherit her husband's property so if there was no one to take care of her once her husband died, she either begged or died.

The unrighteous judge is a rogue! He didn't believe in God and couldn't care less about what anyone thought about him. The widow against the judge. Powerlessness confronts the all powerful. Just like when we go before the God of the universe.

There is nothing we can say to make him change his mind. He already knows what he is going to do. We do not have any insights or advice that he needs to hear. He is all knowing and all seeing. So why bother?

Notice that although the unrighteous judge says he does not respect people, he really does. When it became obvious that this irritating widow was not going away but was going to demand that he uphold the duties of his office, he gave in and did the right thing even though he was unrighteous. We are told,

“For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’ ” “Beat me down” is literally translated, “give me a black eye.” The unrighteous judge knew that this woman was going to destroy his reputation if he didn’t shut her up.

So, in the end, the unrighteous judge did the right thing. In the end, he upheld his office and delivered. Likewise God will do the same. We have his promise that he will always act

consistently with who he is and he is love. We don't need to tell him what he ought to do but we DO need to consistently remind ourselves of who he is and what he has promised.

But for us, God is all well and good until either hard times come or when everything is going too well. In those times God gets pushed over to the passenger seat and we decide to drive. Obviously, nothing God says applies unless everything is easy or it makes us smell like roses. But here's the thing folks. We don't live in a bed of roses. We live in the sewer and the reality is that we are all thieves and adulterers and liars and murderers. You can lie to me and you can lie to yourself all you want but please don't lie to God. Don't tell God that you haven't taken that which was not yours, that you haven't robbed him and others to serve yourselves; that you haven't used other people to get what you want; that you have thought about, said to and done mean and evil things about one another, sometimes even your own husbands and wives, children and parents.

We my friends are sewer rats on our best days. But here's the exciting thing about this text. We have a God that redeems

from the sewer. We have a God who has given himself the task of wandering through our dank and dark and smelly sewers and pulling people out, washing us off with Baptismal waters, feeding us with Word and Sacrament until we have regained our strength and then sending us back into the sewer to continue searching for other rats that need redeeming. Our God is like the unrighteous judge in that we can be certain that he always does the same thing. He always redeems.

So if we know that the nature and office of God is to redeem, what is the point of prayer? It keeps us connected to God and it keeps us mindful of what our lives are about. We too easily get sidetracked and led off to dark, dangerous parts of the sewer. Prayer is what keeps us centered on God and being centered on God is where we find our salvation and how we stay in the light.

God calls us to pray always and not to lose heart because he knows that the sewer is dark and scary. We will feel lost and alone at times. We will get hurt from time to time. And in those times we will be tempted to forget that even in the sewer God is

with us. We will be tempted to panic and revert to old and childish ways. It is then that we pray. We grab onto God like that persistent widow grabbed onto the unrighteous judge. We grab onto God like Jacob did, even with a broken hip. We grab onto God and we remember that he is always just, always merciful and always deeply and madly in love with us. He will lift us up, wash us off again and feed and nurture us once more until the day that we get to leave the sewer behind forever. AMEN.