

Sermon for 19 Pentecost, Year C

Luke 18:1-8

We live in a dangerous world. The earth itself is subject to earthquakes, landslides and volcanic activity that can disrupt and even destroy life. The atmosphere around our planet provides the oxygen we need to breathe, and yet it also generates devastating winds that wipe out entire towns and produces torrential rains, with floods that sweep away everything in their path.

Society, too, holds many dangers for us. Wars between nations, hatred between cultures that leads to genocide, senseless murders, torture, identity theft, robbery, and domestic violence all take their toll and destroy our sense of safety and peace. Greed and unjust systems of government deprive people of their rightful needs—food and shelter—the gifts God provides and intended for all living things from the beginning of time.

We live in a dangerous world. We live in a sinful world. The dangers that threaten us do not end with the perils of the physical realm. We know that there are temptations all around us—without and within. The peace of Eden was disrupted by the serpent, our ancient foe, whispering in the ears of Eve and Adam, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?’” (Gen. 3:1), thus planting the first seeds of rebellion in the hearts of God’s children. From that time on human beings have turned away from the voice of the LORD and done “what was right in their own eyes”, as the ancient Israelites did during the time of the Judges, after God rescued them from slavery in Egypt and brought them into the land of Canaan.

We all face temptation, day after day. It’s evident in the ways we approach life in general. We put ourselves first and our Lord last. Whether we’re trying to make a decision, or worrying about finances or health issues, we trust our own efforts first and turn to God as a last resort. Prayer is too often reserved for worship on Sunday mornings, if we manage to work that into our too-busy schedules, or a hurried recitation of the Lord’s prayer before we fall asleep at night. Perhaps we offer a careless “Come Lord Jesus...” before a meal, or a frightened use of the Lord’s name when we’ve had a near-miss on a busy

highway. But to sit down in a quiet place for awhile to be in the Lord's presence and share our deepest thoughts—our thanks and praise—takes more time that many of us are willing to spend. We ignore our Lord. Then when things go wrong we blame God for abandoning us.

Into this dangerous wilderness of our lives—into the dangers around and within—our heavenly Father speaks to us through His Son, our Lord Jesus. Loving us so much that He sent His Son, the *enfleshed* Word of God, to get our attention—to live among us, to teach us, and to die for our sins, so that in His resurrection He could reclaim us, redeem us, and make us His own through the re-creation that comes in Holy Baptism. Jesus came. And throughout His ministry He called people back to God, and away from reliance on their own foolish “wisdom”. Jesus taught that we must put our trust in the Lord. “*Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...*” (Matt. 6:33); “*Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest...*” (Matt. 11:28); “*Do not be anxious about your life....*” (Matt. 6:32 & 34).

In our Gospel lesson for today, Jesus teaches the disciples that they “*ought always to pray and not lose heart.*” He uses a parable about a widow who needs an advocate and pleads repeatedly to a heartless judge to vindicate her—to give her justice. Jesus says that even this judge, who really doesn't care about the widow or her needs, will stand up for her—not because it's the right thing to do, but because she is persistent in her pleading and wears him down. The judge helps her just to get rid of her. How much more should we be faithful in prayer to the Lord who loves us! We are approaching the God of heaven and earth who loved us so much that He sent His Son. We plead our case with the Creator of all things—Who made us—and Who has the power and authority to do what needs to be done. The Lord will help us because He loves us, and unlike the heartless judge, our Lord *does* care about us and our needs.

Always pray, and do not lose heart. These are our Lord's words to us, his beloved children. The Lord will provide and care for us—not according to our human foolishness, but according to His infinite wisdom and compassion. How many times have we been grateful, after the fact, that God answered our

prayers in a way that was different from what we had hoped for and thought we wanted! How many times has the Lord provided for our needs in a way we could never have imagined!

As small children, most of us learned to sing, “*Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong. They are weak, but He is strong.*” This is the Gospel, the Good News of God’s everlasting love for us. We are all little ones in the eyes of our Lord. We are all weak—but our Savior is strong. And in the pages of the Bible we find the story of God’s love and mercy. He calls us to prayer—to bring before Him our fears, anxieties and concerns. He calls us to persevere in our pleading, to put our trust in Him, and to *never* lose heart.

Jesus loves us, this we know!