

16th October 2022

Hymn

Greeting

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. And also with you.

Sentence

Will not God grant justice to those who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? Luke 18.7-8

Prayer of Preparation

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

O Lord, tireless guardian of your people, teach us to rely, day and night, on your care. Drive us to seek your justice and your help, and support our prayer lest we grow weary, for in you alone is our strength. We make our prayer through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Jeremiah 31.27-34

27 'The days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will plant the kingdoms of Israel and Judah with the offspring of people and of animals. 28 Just as I watched over them to uproot and tear down, and to overthrow, destroy and bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant,' declares the Lord. 29 'In those days people will no longer say, "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." 30 Instead, everyone will die for their own sin; whoever eats sour grapes – their own teeth will be set on edge.

31 'The days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,' declares the Lord. 33 'This is the covenant that I will make with the people of Israel after that time,' declares the Lord. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 34 No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, "Know the Lord," because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,' declares the Lord. 'For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.'

Psalms 119.97-104

97 Lord, how I love your law: it is my meditation all the day long.

98 Your commandments have made me wiser than my enemies: for they remain with me for ever.

99 I have more understanding than all my teachers: for I study your commands.

100 I am wiser than the aged: because I have kept your precepts.

101 I have held back my feet from every evil path: that I might keep your word;

102 I have not turned aside from your judgements: for you yourself are my teacher.

103 How sweet are your words to my tongue: sweeter than honey to my mouth.

104 Through your precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate all lying ways.

2 Timothy 3.10-4.

10 You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, 11 persecutions, sufferings – what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. 12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 13 while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

4 1 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: 2 preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. 3 For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather round them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. 5 But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

Luke 18.1-14

1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. 2 He said: 'In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. 3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, "Grant me justice against my adversary." 4 'For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, "Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!"'

6 And the Lord said, 'Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?'

9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: 10 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: "God, I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get." 13 'But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." 14 'I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted

Sermon

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

the prayers

Let us pray for the world and for the Church. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray,

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

Jesus said: Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Matthew 11.28

God is steadfast in love and infinite in mercy, welcoming sinners and inviting them to the Lord's table.

Confession

Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, confident in God's forgiveness.

Merciful God, our maker and our judge, we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, and in what we have failed to do: we have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves; we repent and are sorry for all our sins. Father, forgive us. Strengthen us to love and obey you in newness of life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Absolution

Almighty God, who has promised forgiveness to all who turn to him in faith: pardon you and set you free from all your sins, strengthen you in all goodness and keep you in eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Peace

We are the body of Christ. **His Spirit is with us.** The peace of the Lord be always with you. **And also with you.**

Hymn

OFFERTORY

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have these gifts to share.

Accept and use our offerings for your glory and for the service of your kingdom.

Blessed be God for ever.

Thanksgiving 2

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.** Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.** It is right to praise you, faithful God, always and everywhere, for with your only begotten Son and life-giving Spirit, you are the one true God from everlasting to everlasting. At the dawn of time you wrought from nothing a universe of beauty and splendour, bringing light from darkness and order from chaos. You formed us, male and female, in your image, and endowed us with creative power. We turned away from you but you did not abandon us. You called us by name and searched us out, making a covenant of mercy, giving the law, and teaching justice by the prophets.

And so we praise you, joining with your faithful people of every time and place, singing the eternal song:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

When the fullness of time was come, you sent your Son to be born of Mary.

Bright image of your glory, he learnt obedience to you in all things, even to death on a cross, breaking the power of evil, freeing us from sin, and putting death to flight.

You raised him from death, exalting him to glory, and the new day dawned.

On the night he was betrayed your Son Jesus Christ shared food with his friends, his companions on the way.

While at table he took bread, blessed, and broke it, and giving it to them, said: 'Take, eat; this is my body.'

He took a cup of wine, and, giving thanks, he gave it to them, and said,

'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Do this in remembrance of me.'

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Therefore, living God, as we obey his command, we remember his life of obedience to you, his suffering and death, his resurrection and exaltation, and his promise to be with us for ever.

With this bread and this cup we celebrate his saving death until he comes.

Accept, we pray, our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, and send your Holy Spirit upon us and our celebration that all who eat and drink at this table may be strengthened by Christ's body and blood to serve you in the world. As one body and one holy people, may we proclaim the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom, with whom, and in whom, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory is yours, eternal God, now and for ever.

Blessing and honour and glory and power are yours for ever and ever. Amen.

As this broken bread was once many grains, which have been gathered together and made one bread:

so may your Church be gathered from the ends of the earth into your kingdom.

The gifts of God for the people of God. Come let us take this holy sacrament of the body and blood of Christ in remembrance that he died for us, and feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for you, preserve your body and soul to everlasting life.

Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your heart by faith with thanksgiving.

The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for you, preserve your body and soul to everlasting life. Drink this in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for you, and be thankful.

AFTER COMMUNION

Bountiful God, at this table you graciously feed us with the bread of life and the cup of eternal salvation.

May we who have reached out our hands to receive this sacrament be strengthened in your service;

we who have sung your praises tell of your glory and truth in our lives; we who have seen the greatness of your love see you face to face in your kingdom and come to worship you with all your saints for ever.

Father, we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice through Jesus Christ our Lord. Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory.

Hymn

Blessing

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord: **In the name of Christ. Amen**



Our gospel reading today is two parables which at first glance don't appear to have a lot in common but by reading the two parables together the reader is instructed to pray with the widow's determination and the tax collector's humility. Someone once characterised the complementary themes of the two parables as 'the promise of persistent prayer and the peril of presumptuous prayer' These two parables, very different though they are in some ways, are both about vindication. The first is more obviously so, since it is set in a law court but in the second the Pharisee turns it into contest by his prayer.

In the ancient Jewish lawcourt all cases were civil cases, there was no jury each case was brought by the wronged party. The defendant and the plaintiff each employed lawyers or represented themselves to the judge who made the judgement. So, every legal case in Jesus' day was a matter of a judge deciding to vindicate one party or the other; vindication or justification here means upholding their side of the story, deciding in their favour.



'Justification' which Paul uses a great deal, means exactly this: that the judge finds in one's favour at the end of the case. In our lives, we have sinned, we are in the wrong, but someone else, in fact the judge himself, has paid our restitution, the fine, the price to compensation our accuser, and so he sets us free 'Just as if we'd never sinned'.

The first parable is a bit puzzling as Jesus clearly intends the judge to stand for God, but this judge is as unlike God as possible. He has no respect for God himself and he doesn't care whether he does the right thing for people or not. The point of the parable is then to say: if even a rotten judge like that can be persuaded to do the right thing by someone who pesters him day and night until it happens, then of course God, who is justice personified and who cares passionately about people will vindicate them and see that justice is done.



Widows and orphans have always been the objects of God's mercy throughout the Old Testament and in the early church widows had a place of honour, and this judge should therefore have looked after the widow at a much earlier stage, but he is in fact unfit for his job. The judge's motive is unimportant; his refusal to hear the case confirms Jesus' characterisation of him as one who has no fear of God or regard for others. We may assume the widow has a legitimate grievance and that the judge is her sole hope of securing justice, and persistence is her only option.

If even an unjust judge will heed the widow and do what is right, how much more so will God do justice for the poor and oppressed.



There is also a lesson on prayer for all of us to heed when we consider the widow's persistence in coming to the judge. We need to consider the importance of praying persistently, earnestly and without losing heart, but we also need to be assured that God will answer those who pray.

The parable of the unjust judge and the persistent widow calls us to examine our faith. Have we turned a deaf ear to those who cry out for justice, who are in need, or have we given up hope that God will hear our cries for help?



The parable assumes that God's people are like petitioners in a lawsuit, waiting for God's verdict. What is the lawsuit about. It is the people of God waiting for God's vindication of them when the people who have opposed his message are finally routed. Like the time Jeremiah was waiting for in our OT reading. The liberating, vindicating judgement that God's people have been waiting and praying for. And if this is true of that final moment, it is true of all such lesser moments, with which the Christian walk is filled.



The second parable looks at first as though it is describing a religious occasion, but it too turns out to be a lawsuit, or perhaps we should say that the lawyer has turned it into an antagonism. The lawyer's prayer consists simply of telling God all about his own good points and ends up exalting himself by the simple expedient of denouncing the tax collector. The tax collector however is the one whose small faith sees through to the great heart of God. And he casts himself on the divine mercy. Jesus tells us what the divine, loving judge, God, would say about this: the tax collector, not the Pharisee, returned home vindicated.

At the beginning of the story, we like the original hearers, are expected to recognise that the Pharisee is a devout person and the tax collector is a stereotypical sinner but then the story turns everything on its head.



The Pharisee's prayer is one of thanksgiving, but it is a self-centred prayer, thanking God that he is not like other people. By other people he means sinners: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector, which links the two characters of the parable. The Pharisee is aware of the tax collector, but the only link is his contempt. Fasting and tithing are the proofs of his piety that he offers to God, but he gives no evidence of humility or contrition. He lives by the Law but not the law of Love.



By contrast the tax collector stands far off, a position that anticipates his confession of unworthiness before God. His prayer echoes Psalm 51 "Have mercy on me, oh God" but then adds 'a sinner'. Nothing more is reported of his prayer. It is complete as it stands and nothing more needs to be said of his character.



Disciples and believers are just as vulnerable to pride and self-righteousness as the Pharisees. Thus, while those who do not recognise their own tendency to play the role of the pharisee in this parable may assume that Jesus was talking about others by the end of the story we have to confront the attitude in our own hearts, verse 14 disallows the limitation of the parable to any one group: *For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted*

Those two parables together make a powerful statement about what in Paul's language is called 'justification by faith'. The wider context is the final lawcourt, in which God's chosen people will be vindicated after their life of suffering, holiness and service. Though enemies outside and inside may denounce and attack them, God will act and show that they are truly his people.

But this doesn't mean that one can tell in the present who God's elect are, simply by the outward badge of virtue, and in particular the observance of the particulars of the Jewish law or whatever we perceive his law to be. However, if you look for genuine penitence, genuine casting of ourselves on the mercies of God and genuine love for the lord and his people there you may find some clues.

Paul in writing to Timothy gives him much good advice and commends him for his persistence and faithfulness, in comparing it to his own. We could do much worse than following this advice to Timothy: *14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,*



Faith requires different responses from the widow and the judge and produces different response in the Pharisee and the Tax collector. What does faith require of us?

Have we the faith of a mustard seed, the faith of a widow, the faith of a tax collector? For each of us the walk is different, some are called to live a life of prayer and other to service, but we can all work on our prayer life and always seek the Lord's help and in every situation.

We all need to be vindicated, and there is no way we can stand before the Lord on judgment day unless we are totally relying on Him to justify us. Our Lord vindicates us and brings us home to be with him for eternity.