

DON'T LOSE HEART

(Luke 18: 1-8)

Intro: When I was a jail chaplain.

-One of the ongoing debates among the inmates was about prayer.

#There were some who said:

*"You should just pray for something one time."

*"If you keep praying for the same thing over and over again,"

+ "It means you have a lack of faith."

*"You should say it just one time."

*"Leave it in God's hands."

*"Then forget about it."

#There were others who said:

*"It's ok to pray for things over and over again."

*"We pray the Lord's Prayer over and over again."

*"It's not a lack of faith to pray for something more than once."

+ "It's a sign of faith."

*"God doesn't want us to just forget about it."

-That discussion would go:

#Back and forth.

#On and on.

#Round and round.

One of the Scriptures I often pointed to.

-To enlighten the discussion.

-To move us past:

"I'm right."

"You're wrong."

-Our Gospel lesson for today.

Luke 18: 1-8.

Jesus told this parable.

* So that his followers:

+ Would always pray.

+ Not lose heart.

I. Don't Lose Heart.

A. That Was A Challenge For Them.

1. Jesus had talked a great deal about the Kingdom of God.

a. Not simply about a future heaven.

b. But about God's reign or rule here on earth.

- "Your kingdom come."

- "Your will be done on earth as in heaven."

2. There are sections of Luke's Gospel that aren't included in our weekly readings.
 - a. One of those sections falls between:
 - Last week's Gospel about the ten lepers.
#Luke 17:11-19.
 - This week's Gospel about the widow and the judge.
#Luke 18:1-8.
 - b. Luke 17:20-21.
 - Jesus says:
 - “The Kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, the Kingdom of God is among you.”
 - c. Jesus is saying:
 - God's rule is already here.
 - It is among you.
 - It is within you.
 3. But evidence of God's rule was hard to see.
 - a. What they could see was Roman rule.
 - Romans occupying their country.
#Imposing their rule against the will of the people.
#Enforcing that rule with the presence of the Roman military.
 - Romans sucking the tax money out of the country.
#Siphoning it off to Rome.
 - b. What they could see was demonic rule.
 - Mentally ill people who were thought to be demon-possessed.
 - c. What they could see included:
 - Lepers.
 - Widows who were taken advantage of.
 4. In the face of so much evidence that God's rule was not in force.
 - a. Jesus encourages his disciples:
 - To keep on praying.
 - Not to lose heart.
 - b. Luke 18:1.
- B. That Is Often A Challenge For Us, Too.
1. We pray.
 - a. For justice.
 - But there is still injustice.
 - b. For peace.
 - But there is still war and violence.
 - c. For daily bread.
 - But there is still poverty and hunger.
 - d. For health and healing.
 - But there is still cancer, cataracts, and heart disease.

2. Why do we pray week after week for the same people?
 - a. Tom Williams.
 - b. Shirley Bryant.
 - c. Warren Werling.
 - d. Many more who are near and dear to our hearts.
3. Our prayers.
 - a. Don't seem to be doing any good.
 - b. Don't seem to be making any difference.
 - Or are they?
 - c. Jesus concludes his parable by asking:
 - “Will the Son of Man find faith on earth when he comes?”
 - d. There is a saying:
 - “Prayer changes things.”
 - #One of the most important things that prayer changes.
 - *Pray-er.
 - *One who prays.
4. In our discussions in the jail about prayer.
 - a. We didn't just read Luke 18: 1-8.
 - b. We also read:
 - Matthew 6:7.
 - #Empty words.
 - #Vain repetitions.
 - *Prayers that are so automatic.
 - +We say them without thinking.
 - Matthew 7:7.
 - #Ask.
 - #Seek.
 - #Knock.
 - *Which in Greek are in the imperfect tense.
 - +Keep on asking.
 - +Keep on seeking.
 - +Keep on knocking.
 - c. But I liked to conclude with the punch line of our Gospel lesson.
 - “Will the Son of Man find faith on earth when he comes?”
 - d. What God looks for on our end of things when we pray is faith.
 - If faith for you means:
 - #Praying one time.
 - #Putting it in God's hands.
 - #Letting it go.
 - *Then:
 - +Pray one time.
 - +Put it in God's hands.
 - +Let it go.

- If faith for you means:
 - #Praying over and over and over again.
 - *Then pray over and over and over again.
- e. Praying over and over and over again.
 - Is not so that God won't forget.
 - #Who we are.
 - #What we need.
 - *"Hey, it's me down here!"
 - It's so that we don't forget.
 - #Who God is.
 - #How much we must depend on God.
 - *For everything that we need.
 - *Even though at times it might feel like:
 - +We are wrestling with God.
 - =Like Jacob did in our Old Testament Lesson.
 - =Genesis 32: 22-31.
 - It's so that we don't lose:
 - #Heart.
 - #Faith.
 - *One of the goals of our 5x5x5 small groups.
 - +Pray with and for each other.
 - +Pray for the ministry of this congregation.
 - +Pray for the mission of the larger church.
 - *Praying with and for each other.
 - +Way of encouraging one another.
 - =So that we don't lose:
 - Faith.
 - Heart.

II. We Don't Want To Lose Heart So That We Can Have A Heart.

- A. The Unjust Judge In Our Gospel Didn't Have A Heart.
 - 1. He was about as unqualified as a judge could be.
 - a. He didn't fear God.
 - Here it was his job:
 - #Interpret.
 - #Enforce.
 - *God's law.
 - b. He didn't respect people.
 - He couldn't have cared less about:
 - #This widow.
 - #Her rights.

2. But that didn't stop the widow.
 - a. She didn't have an advocate.
 - Her husband was dead.
 - She had to find her own voice.
 - b. She wouldn't take "no" for an answer.
3. Finally the judge had a change of heart.
 - a. Actually it was his eyes that he was concerned about.
 - b. He said to himself:
 - “I don't fear God.”
 - “I don't respect anyone.”
 - “But if I don't see that justice is done for this widow,”
 - “She's going to wear me out.”
 - #Greek word there actually means:
 - *“She will give me a black eye.”
 - c. Judge could get a black eye in a number of ways.
 - Widow could give the judge no rest.
 - #So that he got bags under his eyes.
 - She could get frustrated enough to clobber him.
 - #Punching him out.
 - #Swatting him with her hand bag.
 - *Like Ruth Buzzi used to do years ago.
 - +On Laugh In.
 - *I'm showing my age again.
 - She could make him look bad in the eyes of the community.
 - #Causing him to lose face.
 - d. So the judge finally sees that justice is done.
 - He comes to have a change of heart.

B. God Has A Heart.

1. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.
 - a. John 3:16.
 - b. God has a heart.
2. How that heart must have broken!
 - a. When that son was:
 - Arrested.
 - Tried.
 - Convicted.
 - Sentenced.
 - Executed.
 - b. When it was our sins that nailed Jesus to that cross.
 - Our sins.
 - #Not doing justice.
 - #Not caring.
 - #Not having a heart.

3. But God has a heart.
 - a. Seeing that justice is done.
 - b. Seeing that sinners are justified through faith.
 - c. Seeing that there is resurrection and new life.
 - For Jesus.
 - For us.
 - d. Seeing that prayers are heard and answered.
 - Not because we wear God down.
 - Because God has a heart.
 - e. Seeing to it that we have a heart.

C. We Have A Heart.

1. When we stock our Helping Hands food pantry.
2. When we fill out our Time & Talent Surveys.
3. When we are generous with our Statement of Intent cards.
4. When we are persistent advocates for justice.
 - a. At the beginning of my ministry.
 - I was a chaplain for both.
 - #St. Louis County Hospital.
 - #St. Louis County Jail.
 - b. In the hospital there was a security ward.
 - Where inmates from the jail were confined.
 - #When they needed to be hospitalized.
 - But there was no phone in that security ward.
 - #I didn't think that was fair.
 - *Guys in the jail had access to phones.
 - +To stay in touch with:
 - =Families.
 - =Attorneys.
 - *Why should inmates be denied that privilege.
 - +Simply because they were:
 - =Ill.
 - =Injured.
 - +Inmates could be in the hospital for weeks and months.
 - c. I went to the head of social services with my concern.
 - Social services monitored phone privileges in the jail.
 - I was told:
 - #"Can't be done."
 - #"Security."
 - *That was the common rationale.
 - +Whenever the jail didn't want to be bothered.
 - =With something new or different.
 - *Security.

- d. I went to the Deputy Chief of Custody.
 - “Can’t be done.”
 - “Security.”
 - #I was told.
- e. I went to the Chief of Custody.
 - “Can’t do it.”
 - “Hospital has no phone line in there.”
- f. I went to the hospital administrator.
 - “We can put a phone line in there.”
 - “That’s no problem.”
 - “But we don’t have jurisdiction over that area.”
 - “That’s a matter for the jail administration.”
- g. I went back to the Chief of Custody.
 - I told him what the hospital administrator had said.
 - But he put me off.
 - #“We can’t put a phone in there.”
 - #“It will jeopardize our security.”
 - *I wasn’t convinced.
 - *I was not ready to give up.
- h. I went to the Director of Justice Services for St. Louis County.
 - Department that oversees jail operations.
 - #I told you this happened at the beginning of my ministry.
 - *As I gained experience over the years.
 - +I came to understand.
 - =This is where I should have started.
 - I asked him about a phone for the security ward.
 - #Every time I saw him over the next:
 - *Weeks.
 - *Months.
 - #I asked him about that phone.
 - #I bugged him about that phone.
- i. One day I went into the security unit to visit a patient.
 - Lo and behold.
 - There was a phone in there.
 - #Whether to shut me up.
 - #Or because it was the right thing to do.
 - There was no security risk.
 - #In fact, the correctional officers used it the most.
 - *They could call the nurses’ station.
 - +Without leaving their post.
 - *They could call the jail.
 - +If there was an issue or problem.
 - *They could even call their girlfriends.

- Jail administration had had a change of heart.
 - #Because I had had a heart.
 - #Because I did not lose heart.
- 5. I have a saying about prayer:
 - a. "If you pray for potatoes, you had better grab a hoe."
 - That's hoe with an "e."
 - #Lest I be accused of having a Don Imus moment.
 - b. What we pray for.
 - We work for.
 - #If we pray for daily bread.
 - *We work for daily bread.
 - #If we pray for peace.
 - *We work for peace.
 - #If we pray for healing.
 - *We work for healing.
 - #If we pray for telephones.
 - *We work for telephones.
 - If we do not lose heart.
 - If we do not lose faith.

Concl: That is why God:

- Speaks God Word.
- Invites our prayers.
- Feeds our souls.
 - #With and bread and wine.

So that we do not lose heart.
 So that the Son of Man will find faith on earth when he comes.

