

October 19, 2025—The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
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## Unexpected Faith

“When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” Well, as I said last week, I think the answer to that question depends on what you think faith looks like and where you expect to find it. So to illustrate what *Jesus* thinks faith looks like, he tells this story, of a widow who will not rest until she gets justice.

“Grant me justice against my opponent,” is her demand to the judge. Jesus doesn’t tell us what her complaint is about, but it’s important to remember, I think, that the distinction we make between civil and criminal law did not exist in Jesus’ context. Whether someone caused damage to your property or stole from you or killed someone in your family, the legal process is the same: you take them to court, bring them before a judge, and demand justice. There’s no district attorney here, no one arguing on behalf of the state to uphold the laws of the state. Just a judge deciding between two people—one who was wronged and the one they say wronged them. So the widow’s opponent could be someone who swindled her or someone who killed her husband, we don’t know. What we do know is that it was important enough to this widow that she wouldn’t rest—or let the judge rest—until she was granted justice.

Luke tells us that this parable is about our need to pray always and not to lose heart, as if to say that if even a corrupt judge who has no respect for God or other people will eventually give in because he doesn’t want to be bothered any more, then surely a God who actually does care about us will answer our prayers for justice. “Will not God grant justice to God’s chosen ones who cry to God day and night? Will God delay long in helping them?” Well, the thing that makes this parable a little difficult to hear, I think, is that it often feels like God has delayed plenty long in helping us, and justice is still a long way off. All too often God feels more like that unjust judge than like a loving parent eager to grant us the justice we seek.

In that context, I find some comfort and some inspiration in the example of the widow’s faith. There is nothing passive about her faith. She’s not just sitting back and trusting that the arc of the moral universe automatically bends toward justice, so surely she’ll get it eventually. She keeps coming to the judge, keeps pressing her case, like, “Hey, how long are you going to let this guy get away with what he’s done to me? When are you going to make this right? I’m not going to leave you alone until you fix this.” She’s willing to contend with this judge, to wrestle with him until he yields.

In that way, she’s just like Jacob, who in our first reading this morning wrestled with God until God gave him a blessing. And at the end of that mysterious, all-night wrestling match, the divine being gives Jacob a new name: “You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel”—which means “the one who strives with God”—“for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.” And based on that story, the people of God took on the same name. They named themselves “the ones who strive with God” because that’s what faith is. Faith is a willingness to wrestle, to strive and contend, to argue with God until we manage to wrangle some blessing out of the wrestling.

Arguing with God might not fit with your idea what faith is. We sometimes equate faith with certainty, or with belief, as if faith were the opposite of doubt maybe even the opposite of the kind of wrestling and striving we see in Jacob and in the persistent widow. You’ll hear people preach that faith requires an acceptance of Scripture as some kind of literal dictation from the mouth of God, as if it’s enough to claim, “God said it, I believe it, that settles it!” But when the author of 2 Timothy wrote, “All scripture is inspired by God,” that is not what he meant. That sentence goes on to say that it’s “*useful* for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,” and of course the only Scripture that author knew was what we call the Old Testament. The Scripture is *useful* insofar as we are willing to wrestle with it, to grapple it and extract blessing from it and find in it what the Spirit might be saying to God’s people in our situation here and now. There’s nothing easy about that process, and certainly

nothing passive; it's not a matter of simply accepting everything you read on the page as a statement of literal truth. The Scripture is useful, but sometimes we have to sift through a lot of other stuff that's not so useful in order to find what's useful.

Faith is our willingness to keep doing that, to trust that there is blessing to be found. Faith is, fundamentally, our trust that God still has blessings for us, each time we come back and pound on God's door.

And God does have blessings to give. Sometimes God's blessing is just enough strength to say a word of praise as we limp away from our time of striving, maybe not yet comforted but at least aware that comfort is possible. Sometimes God's blessing is a sense of joy that lets us celebrate what God has already done while we eagerly look ahead to what God will yet do. Sometimes God's blessing is a hope that drives us forward to do the work of God's promised kingdom even in the midst of this broken world.

And sometimes God's blessing is the awareness that, as we love and serve our neighbors, we are serving God, who is right there, loving us back. Or the awareness that, as we march and protest and demand justice God is beside us in the crowd, protesting injustice with us. Or the awareness that when we build bridges to include people on the margins, outsiders and outcasts, we are inviting God to draw near to us.

And sometimes God's blessing is just the sun coming up on a new day, a new beginning, and a fresh start as we leave the past behind.

"When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Will he find faith in us? May God give us faith like that persistent widow's and like Jacob's—faith enough to wrestle all night with God, faith enough to strive and contend, to argue with God until we manage to wrangle some blessing out of all our striving.

Amen.