

# Not losing heart

Almighty and everlasting God, in Christ you have revealed your glory among the nations: Preserve the works of your mercy, that your Church throughout the world may persevere with steadfast faith in the confession of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*The Collect for Proper 24, The Book of Common Prayer, page 235*

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THE 22<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (LECTIONARY: PROPER 24C)

Genesis 32:22-31, Psalm 121, 2 Timothy 2:8-15, Luke 18:1-8

October 16, 2016

**ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY**

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

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THE GOSPEL READING: LUKE 18:1-8

Jesus told his disciples a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

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I want to begin in a somewhat pedantic way by asking you to take the Book of Common Prayer and turn to page 845, initially, where you will see An Outline of the Faith, Common called the Catechism. And then to turn to page 856, where, in the middle of the page, you will see the question: "What is prayer?" and the response: "Prayer is responding to God, by thought and by deeds, with or without words."

I bring your attention to this definition of prayer in relation to the focus of the gospel reading, and, to some extent, the reading from Genesis. But, in particular, where we find in the gospel reading: "Jesus told his disciples a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart."

Praying always and never losing heart may be a prayer of words but this prayer may also be prayer of action – faith as a verb, as

I have mentioned a couple of times recently, versus faith as ideas or concepts.

The parable is of a widow – so someone who is most likely abandoned both in her family and in her culture – is persistently returning to an unjust judge for justice. In a sense, the matter have been a small one, but widows in the ancient world lived on such thin margins (as many do today throughout the world) that attention needed to be paid to it.

As a figure, the widow is a model for us of clear, focused intention, active determination based on a vision.

So often we simply go along with whatever it seems the culture is doing, whatever path seems available, what most people seem to be doing, a “norm” that is also, often, a lowest common denominator. Also, we are so easily distracted by many inessentials that what is most clearly at the heart of our lives – or life itself – is overlooked.

In the parable, the widow prevails over an unjust judge and so the sense of the parable is: if this works with even an unjust judge, think how much more effective it is going to be when it comes to our God of undying love in us and with us – God who is already so deeply concerned for us, for the life of the world, so committed to life, to profound justice in and for the

world.

Within the heart of God, where we live, our persistence, our never losing heart (which is our heart, but also God’s heart) is full of hope as our prayer may be, likely is, prayer of real work, actual movement on behalf of life that really is life – for ourselves and for the world around us.

We baptize today Anthony James Ryan Truax and at the signing of the cross we say: “Stand bravely in the life of God against all the powers of darkness and death, and remain faithful to the end of your life.”

For Anthony and for all of us, we are more and more clear about “the powers of darkness and death” in our lives and in the world around us. Standing bravely in the life of God – and with God – we take up the life of this persistent widow or, occasionally, the life of Jacob wrestling with the angel of God by the Jabbok, in which Jacob wrestled a blessing for himself and his descendants in the world.

In that case, wrestling, as Jacob understood it, with God’s own self, was an action in which Jacob was changed, given a new name, “Israel,” and found more of his identity and purpose. So that painful undertaking was not so much to change God’s mind but to be engaged so profoundly that God could change Jacob.

So it seems to me that we are

called to not losing heart and to have heart in what we are doing day by day in all aspects of our lives, all of which arise from our identity as Christ's own forever.

This kind of persistent prayer in deeds, in what we actually do, with or without words, will draw us beyond conventional patterns and sometimes beyond what some might call "common sense."

What kind of church do you want, how vibrant, how vital, how open, how hospitable, how purposeful, how sustainable, how well resourced, how connected to the world, how essential to the life of the Santa Ynez Valley and to people beyond? How do you want this place to welcome the stranger, to serve children, youth, to be part of the real world, not separate from the world?

What kind of community do you want? How do you see our community in terms of caring for the least, the lost, the left out?

How do we want our schools, workplaces, social networks and organizations to serve the common good?

What kind of family and what about the character of your friendships?

Going along to get along is not going to cut it.

We all need to be the widow in this parable today, continually coming back, not getting lost in our screens, our social lives, our

consumer products while what is truly important is slipping away.

Very often "the powers of darkness and death" rely on simple apathy or passivity or inattention. Though, we are also more than aware of how aggressive these negative powers can be.

So the call of being in Christ, of expressing the reality of our baptism, of our identity, who we are in God (which is our blessing) is persevering, letting our prayer be what we do, with or without words, discovering the deep and profound justice of God in the actual world in which we live, reordering our lives and our attention and being able to be clear in reshaping our focus and our use of all of our resources to be engaged in this kind of prayer in our whole lives – and for our wholeness in life.

In this way, in our hearts, bodies and minds – and together with others – for the sake of the world God so loves – we actively love God and love others as ourselves.



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