

We are disciples of Jesus Christ – chosen by him in Holy Baptism for a relationship that shapes and defines our lives from that point on.

A relationship involves give and take, communication, conversation.

Even a long-distance relationship requires some form of interaction.

Jesus lived on earth in order to bring people into a saving relationship with Almighty God.

He represents the invisible Father in heaven and by the power of the Holy Spirit, mediates the relationship with the Father.

That's why he said of himself, "I am the way and the truth and the life – no one can come to the Father except through me."

Coming to the Father is the goal of discipleship – that we take our place in the Father's house that Jesus has prepared for us.

So, Jesus shows us how to interact with God – how to have conversation with the Source of life itself.

He said, "Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name ... and you know the rest of it.

Prayer, then, is the way in which we communicate with God and God, in turn, speaks to us through the Word.

Now at the end of chapter 17 of Luke's gospel, Jesus had been talking to the disciples about the end time – the day of the Lord's coming at the consummation of time.

It was a terrifying picture he painted of thunder and lightning, hellfire and brimstone, earthquakes and floods – the sort of disaster from which we must run without going back to the house for our purses or wallets or cellphones or photo albums or anything else we think we have to have.

It is a time of life and death – of some being saved and others perishing.

And then come the words beginning our text this morning:

Then Jesus told them a parable about the need to pray always and not lose heart.

So the story that follows is about how to be in relationship with God when life is collapsing all around us – when things are really bad – when we have to choose a president among candidates whom we cannot trust to lead us in the ways of God – when it seems that everything is going wrong.

So we start out with this judge who ignores the commandments of God and has no respect for people.

He is something like many bosses, politicians and world leaders. I don't think it is difficult for most of us to imagine a person like this.

So it is his job to render justice but he doesn't generally do so. He is unjust.

But he is the only judge in town, so the widow goes to him to plead her case.

Now Jesus doesn't tell us what the problem is, but in telling us she's a widow we can make some guesses.

- A widow's source of sustenance has died
- By law, she is supposed to marry her deceased husband's brother, who is to take care of her.
- So perhaps, this widow's brother in law has refused to do this, or has turned her out of his house, or has physically abused her, leaving her homeless and without a means of living.
- Or perhaps she has set up a business for herself – baking bread, or sewing clothes – and perhaps a supplier has overcharged her or given her less product than she paid for, or she gave someone an order she had prepared and the person refused to pay.
- Or maybe the tax collector has come and demanded so much in taxes that she will lose her home or face debtor's prison.

These are all situations for which a widow might beg for justice.

Whatever the situation, she goes to the judge about it – and she does not give up.

Remember – Jesus told this parable to those facing dire circumstances so that they would pray without ceasing and not lose heart.

This widow does not go once to the judge, or twice, or three times, -- she goes daily so that the judge complains that her incessant pleading is as though she is beating him black and blue.

So, Jesus says, The unjust judge will hear the widow's case and grant her justice just to end the onslaught of pleas.

Now comes the central point Jesus makes:

If this is what the *unjust* judge does—if the unjust judge does give justice to the widow – will not God who is just and good – do justice for those he himself has chosen to love who are crying out to him day and night? And do it quickly?

Of course!

But Jesus ends the parable with a challenge to his hearers – However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?

At his coming at the end of time, will Jesus find God's people pleading with God for justice day and night?

Will he find his disciples praying without ceasing, trusting God to hear and answer even when God's answer seems to delay?

This is the challenge for us today – that we not look at the world around us and give up on God, give up on praying for justice, give up on faith.

Instead, Jesus' challenge is for us to increase and intensify our prayers – to trust God even more to act to save his beloved people.

For this reason, we are offering a community prayer service on the Monday evening before election day – to plead with God, to pray for mercy, wisdom, guidance, and justice.

And in praying, we trust our just judge to make everything work together for good for good for those who love the Lord and are called according to his purpose, as it says in Romans 8:28.

Pleading with God especially when things are going wrong is an important witness and necessary communication in relationship with our heavenly Father.