**A reading from the gospel of Luke, chapter 18 beginning to read at verse 1.**

**18** 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?”**

**This is the word of the Lord…**

**Talk:**

"Always pray," Jesus tells us. That isn't easy. We've all had the experience of praying without receiving the answer we wanted. It's difficult to keep our enthusiasm when seems that God isn't listening.

That happened to Huckleberry Finn, the boy in Mark Twain's novel:

Miss Watson told Huck to pray every day, promising that he would get what he asked for.

Huck tried it, but it didn't work**.**

**"Once I got a fish-line, but no hooks,"** he said.

"It warn't any good to me without hooks. I tried for the hooks three or four times, but somehow I couldn't make it work."

So Huck gave up on prayer. "**There ain't nothin' in it," he concluded.**

We've all been tempted to come to the conclusion that

"There ain't nothin' in it." We've prayed for things far more important than fishhooks without getting the desired result.

But Jesus told this parable of the widow and the judge to encourage us **"that we must always pray, and not give up."** The story has two principal characters – a widow and a judge. The widow has suffered injustice and has come to the judge for help.

But this was not a good judge. Jesus said that the judge

**"didn't fear God and didn't respect man"**.

The judge didn't care what anyone thought – including God.

If you ever have to go to court, pray that you don't end up standing before a judge like this one.

The **widow** came to this judge to win justice.

That word, "widow," tells us everything that we need to know about her.

Widows in that society were as helpless as helpless can be. Widows were not allowed to inherit their husband's estate,

so they were completely dependent on their children.

Because of this, God commanded Israel to be considerate of widows. Jewish law included special provisions to take care of widows. Deuteronomy warned that anyone failing to help widows would be accursed.

Let’s digress for a moment to say that God has a special place in his heart for all vulnerable people – widows, orphans, and the poor. If you want to get into real trouble with God, just take advantage of vulnerable people. He says**,**

**“If you have done that, pray for forgiveness. Change your ways and pray.”**

But this judge didn't fear God. We know from the beginning that this judge is not to be trusted. We can see that, if this woman needs the judge's help, **she’s in trouble**. She cannot depend on this judge to do the right thing. And, true to his character, the judge does nothing for the widow.

But this widow keeps coming back –and back – and back.

She becomes a nagging presence in this judge's courtroom and begins to get on his nerves.

For the most part, the judge doesn't care what people think––but he knows that there is a fine line that he dares not cross. If he treats this widow too roughly, the community will turn against him. **He might lose his job**.

Her nagging presence begins to wear him down, so he says:

**"Though I neither fear God, nor respect man,**

**yet because this widow bothers me, I will defend her,**

**or else she will wear me out by her continual coming".**

That's the end of the parable. Then Jesus comments:

**"Won't God avenge his chosen ones,**

**who are crying out to him day and night".**

So, what's the point he’s making?

At the time that Luke wrote this Gospel, the church was in the midst of persecution. Christians were looking forward to the Second Coming, when The Messiah would relieve them of their suffering and reward them for their faithfulness.

But they were having trouble keeping their chins up, because life for Christians was hard – terrible. I'm sure that Luke thought about that as he wrote these words of Jesus:

**"Won't God avenge his chosen ones,**

**who are crying out to him day and night."**

I think that Jesus is contrasting the BAD JUDGE with a GOOD GOD.

Jesus is saying that, if this BAD JUDGE will help this widow, we can be sure that our LOVING GOD will help us.

 That doesn't mean that God will give us everything that we ask for.

Can you imagine the chaos that would result if God **did** give everyone everything they asked?

Surely if God were like a genie responding to every wish, it would be **chaos**!

It would be like all the parents turning over all the car keys to all their children. A loving God can't do that.

But Jesus promises that God will grant justice to those who cry to him day and night. That was a special promise for persecuted Christians in Luke's day,

but it's a promise to us too. God will hear us when we pray. God will help us when we pray.

**However, answers to prayer often come slowly.**

The story is told of George Mueller – a great Christian of many years ago.

Early in his ministry, Mueller began to pray for five people by name. Mueller prayed for those five people every day without exception. Sick or well – at home or abroad – he prayed for those five people every day.

After eighteen months, one of the five became a Christian. Eighteen months - a year and a half. **That's a long time.**

 Mueller kept praying. **Five years** later, one more became a Christian.

 Six more years passed, and a third became a Christian. That means that Mueller had prayed every day for **twelve years**, and only **three** of the five became Christians.

Mueller kept praying for the other two, but then he died without seeing ever his prayers answered.

But then, more than fifty years after Mueller began his prayers, the other two finally became Christians.

 Mueller did not live to see it, but his prayers were answered.

Jesus says:

**"Won't God avenge his chosen ones,**

**who are crying out to him day and night."**

But it's difficult to keep praying when we don't see results. We are tempted to believe that God isn't listening. We are tempted to give up on prayer.

 Martin Luther knew how difficult it could be to maintain a good prayer life.

In *Table Talk*, Luther wrote of seeing his dog at the dinner table, waiting expectantly for some morsel from his master.

The dog would sit at attention, every fibre of his body focused on his master, hoping for a bit of food. If you have a dog, you have probably seen it. During dinner, you have the dog's rapt, unwavering attention.

Luther said,

 **"Oh, if I could only pray the way this dog watches the meat!"**

Philip Yancey reminds us that Jesus experienced unanswered prayer too. Yancey mentions three occasions where Jesus' prayers went unanswered:

• Jesus' FIRST unanswered prayer was when he prayed all night before choosing his disciples. Yancey says,

**"If you read the Gospels,**

**you marvel that this dodgy dozen**

**could be the answer to any prayer."**

But, after the resurrection, that motley crew changed the world. Perhaps Jesus' prayer was answered after all.

• Jesus' SECOND unanswered prayer was in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus prayed that the cup of death might pass him by. That prayer was not answered in the way that Jesus asked, but something else happened.

Jesus prayer strengthened him – centred him – prepared him for what lay ahead.

So maybe Jesus' prayer was answered after all.

• Jesus' THIRD unanswered prayer is found in John 17. Jesus prayed that his disciples might all be one

**"so that the world may believe that you sent me"**.

When we look at the church today, we might see that Jesus' prayer has not yet been answered. But the answer could be on the way even as we speak.

We wish that God would answer Jesus' prayer in our lifetime–but I'm confident that God will answer it in God's good time.

We wish that prayer were like a genie in a bottle. We wish we could rub the bottle and have God pop up to do whatever we wanted.

But prayer is more like a child snuggling up to a father or mother – looking for comfort – using stumbling words to talk about things **barely understood**.

The child's words are **precious** to that father or mother.

Perhaps our prayers are precious to God because **we** are precious to God.

Perhaps God invites us to come back again – and again – and again – because He loves to hear from us. Perhaps He loves to have us near -- **loves to have us snuggle up to him**. He loves us far more than any mothers or fathers love their child.

And while God might not always give us everything we want --any more than we would give our children everything they want – He promises to bless us when we call on him day and night.

So, let’s make prayer a regular part of our life. Spend time with God - **snuggle up to him**.

Then wait to see how God will bless us.