

Sermon 20th October 2019
Luke 18:1-8
“The Squeaky Wheel”



A little while back.

I was wide awake at some ungodly hour of the morning.
So I made myself a cup of coffee.
And sat down and watched the box.
TV.

I managed to find a movie on SBS.
A movie I had never watched before.
It was ***Fiddler on the Roof***.

Who saw it when it first came out in the cinemas??

Who married that date???

I really like Tevya.

The father of a Jewish family of all girls.

If you really study the character of Tevya.

You would see he's very human.

A common sort of a bloke.

But at the same time.

He's wiser than many so-called wise people of this world.

He also has a good relationship with his God.

He's comfortable with God.

He can talk freely with God about most any subject.

His prayers to God are from the depth of his being.

And at times they're very funny.

But at the same time.

They reflect the concerns he has with his life.

And the world around him.

I want to share just one of his conversations with God this morning.

Listen not only to his words.

But the feelings.

Tevya is talking to God.

(VIDEO)

“Today I’m a horse.

Dear God did you have to make my poor old horse loose his shoe just before the Sabbath.

That wasn’t nice.

It’s enough you pick on me, Tevya, bless me with five daughters, a life of poverty.

What have you got against my horse?

Sometimes I think when things are too quiet up there, you say to yourself:

‘Let’s see, what kind of mischief can I play on my friend Tevya.’”

He continues talking to God.

“As the Good Book says, Heal us, O Lord, and we shall be healed.

In other words, send us the cure, we’ve got the sickness already.

I’m not really complaining - after all, with your help, I’m starving to death.

You made many, many poor people.

I realize, of course, that it’s no shame to be poor, but it’s no great honour either.

So what would have been so terrible if I had a small fortune?”

Can you sense the comfort??

The ease Tevya had in talking with God??

Maybe his theology wasn’t the best!!

Blaming God for all of his troubles.

But his expression.

His right to express these kinds of feelings to God...

Is what prayer is all about.

As you can tell by now...

Our Gospel this morning talks about the power of prayer.

One might assume that the setting of the passage.

Was Jesus and his disciples were discussing prayer.

Now I'm sure you have wondered too...

Does prayer change the mind of God?

Does prayer change the mind of the prayer?

Does it do any good?

I have known good Christians who say they rarely pray.

Yet there are times when we do pray with persistence.

In the face of danger.

Illness.

War.

Violence.

Concern for our kids or parents.

In the fog of the unknown.

As the old saying goes....

"There are no atheists in a foxhole.

In the trenches."

And life at times is just one battle after another.

A little poem goes.

**Dear Heavenly Father:
I'm working on a puzzle pure and simple.
It is I.**

**Dear searching child:
Here's the answer to your puzzle pure and simple.
It is I.**

Prayer is the struggle of searching.
Of asking.
Of bringing ourselves to God.

It's that sort of dire situation.
That we find in the Gospel.

Jesus told his disciples a parable about their need to pray always and not lose heart.

It's a parable of a judge who **"neither feared God nor had respect for people."**

We don't know if he is corrupt or not.
Maybe he was on the take.
Maybe not.

What we do know.
Is that the judge didn't believe in anything beyond himself.
This judge didn't believe that he would ever be judged.

And we assume.
That this judge.
Who respected no person.
Cared little about widows.
And orphans.

And the poor of the land.
And the refugee.
Those whom the law commanded him to protect.

Jesus said he had no respect for anyone.

In **Luke**.

There's a special concern for the poor and lowly.
For the widow and orphan.
For the refugee and the homeless.

Beside the judge in this story.
Is a widow who sought justice against an opponent.

If the judge was corrupt.
Then we find the widow is a person without resources to bribe the official.

A Bible commentator noted...

"In ancient Palestinian society the widow was helpless and could exert no real influence on those in power, having lost the support of the man to whom she was married."

Without a father.
Without a brother.
Without a husband.
Without a son.
She was destitute.

Jesus uses her as an example of all those who are poor.
And powerless.
And without prestige.
And pennies.

Who rely upon faith in God.
And not themselves.

We all know ***“squeaky wheels”***...
And how their persistence gets them what they want.

The widow was certainly persistent.
She keeps bothering the judge.
Until he finally gives in to her demands...

***‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think,
yet because this widow keeps bothering me,
I will see that she gets justice,
so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’***

The Greek is stronger than the translation.
It really says...

“She will give me a black eye if I don’t give in.”

I don’t know if these words are literal or figurative.
She mightn’t intend to clock the judge one.
But she was certainly wearing him down by her persistence.
She’s a good example of a ***“squeaky wheel”*** which gets the oil.

Now it seems strange advice of Jesus to give his disciples.
And us.

That we should be ***“squeaky wheels”*** before God.

So persistent in bringing our needs to God.
That we get what we want.

People, in Jesus’ day.

Prayed to their pagan gods repetitiously heaping words upon words.
They performed rituals to get the god's attention.
Some even slashed themselves so their blood would cry out.

Jesus says that the Lord God isn't like that...
God knows our needs even before we ask God's help.
He's not sleeping.
Or on a nomad sightseeing trip or cruise somewhere.
Or too busy to help us.

We have a loving heavenly Father.
Who outdoes any earthly parent in taking care of us.
And meeting our needs.

During the Rugby World Cup telecasts they've showed a few Shinto shrines.
Shinto worship is really quite easy.
Clap twice.
Bow to the idol.
And then clap twice more.

Why clap loudly?

To get the god's attention.

Well.
Our God isn't like that.
A figure made of stone.

Our God promises to hear us.
And help us.
And save us.

Yet Jesus commends the widow's persistence.

He is using the contrast between an unjust judge.

And a righteous God.

"How much more will our loving God hear us and give us what we need."

God doesn't forsake or abandon God's children...

"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?

I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly."

Jesus closes his parable with a strange sentence:

"However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

Martin Luther.

Once lifted a piece of meat from his table and dangled it enticingly in front of his dog "***Teufel***".

Devil in German.

Of course the dog was interested in the meat and wanted it.

Teufel jumped up and tried to get it.

Luther said that he wished he could pray with such longing and desire. With such concentration and intensity as his dog sought the meat.

Luther said then his heart and soul would look only to Jesus Christ.

God wants us to pray with persistence and intensity.

God wants us to communicate with him as with our best friend.

We don't need to use fancy phrases.
And convoluted prayer language.
You don't talk to your best mate that way.
You don't need to talk to God that way.

Luther is right too...
We should pray to our loving God.
As a dog barks.
And jumps.
And wags the tail before the master.

We should approach our Lord.
As a child seeing his mother.
Or hearing the voice of her father.

And we should bring all our needs to God.

To pray.
And not lose heart.

Jesus tells us.

To seek.

To ask.

To knock.

Those verbs in Greek have the sense of keep on with it.

Keep on seeking what you need.
Keep on asking.
Keep on knocking at the door.
And you'll be given what you need.

And it's certainly true.

That prayer will change us.

As we pray.

And keep on praying.

We come closer to God.

We realize that we aren't alone with our problems.

But God is there to help us.

And strengthen us.

And encourage us.

And console us.

The widow was changed.

As she kept on coming to the judge for justice.

Kierkegaard, wrote in his journals...

**One kind of person thinks and imagines
that when he prays,
the important thing —
the thing he must concentrate upon
is that God should hear what he is praying for.
And yet in the true, eternal sense
it is just the reverse.
The true relationship in prayer
is not when God hears what is prayed for,
but when the person praying
continues to pray until he is the one who hears,
who knows, what God wills.**

There's another poem that goes.

***The light of God surrounds me,
The love of God enfolds me,***

*The power of God protects me,
The presence of God watches over me,
Where I am, God is!!*

As we pray.
We bring God our specific.
Actual.
Everyday needs.

God becomes more real to us.
Nearer to us.
God's will for us becomes clearer.

God's spirit comes to us.
And mingles with our spirit.
So that we might be encouraged.
So that we might be enabled.
So that we might be strengthen.
To bring from the depth of our souls.
All those needs.
All those doubts.
All those struggles.
All those joys.
All those thanksgivings.
All those celebrations.
All those events of life into the presence of God.

The **why's** of life.
Can never be answered fully.
Even in our deepest struggles with God.

But like **Tevya**.
Those struggles bring us into a deeper relationship with God.

I have learned that God can handle my anger.

My frustrations with life.

My struggles with relationships.

My **WHYS**.

My **HOW COMES**.

My **IT ISN'T FAIRS**.

My **YOU'VE GOTTA BE KIDDINGS**.

Because our relationship isn't built on some sloppy, sentimental idea.

That life is always going to be glorious.

Always going to be easy.

But that in our honest relationship.

One gets to share.

Not only the good.

But also the challenges of life with God.

If the widow can come again.

And again.

And again.

Demanding justice from the judge.

Don't give up on God.

Don't lose heart.

But keep praying.

Be a ***"squeaky wheel."***

Talk to God as your best friend.

Your mate who knows you even better than you know yourself.

And your loving God will give you what you need.

Amen.