

An Invitation to Pray

Thank you for joining your hearts and thoughts as we come together in prayer over this Memorial Day Weekend! I would invite you, as we begin this vigil, to read Luke 18:1-8, it is an interesting parable of Jesus about a poor widow who is being harassed but she has no cash, clout or connections. She's got no way to protect herself and her only hope is to plead her case before the local judge whom Jesus describes this way – "he has no fear of God and no respect for people." He refuses to help her so she resolves to pester this guy until she wears him out – which is what she did! And she finally receives protection from the crooked, uncaring judge because of her extraordinary ability to pester him.

And the moral of the story seems to be - it pays to pester! That may be the only way to get what you need or want from someone who is not inclined to grant it to you – right? Now, if you read Luke 18, you know that Jesus told this parable in order to motivate people to pray more. And in the last two verses Jesus says, "Now shall not God bring about justice for His people who cry to Him day and night and will He delay long over them? I tell you God will bring about justice for them speedily" which is a tip-off to the fact that this story is not an allegory but it is a brilliantly devised and cleverly communicated study in contrast.

You see, what our Savior is saying is that we're not like that widow; she was forgotten and abandoned – but if we are in the family of God, if God in His grace has made us His own through faith in Jesus – then we're not forgotten or abandoned or hopeless or without connections – **we are the very sons and daughters of God**, adopted into His forever family through Jesus and we are treasured in God's sight - that's the point that Jesus was making. Our Heavenly Father is anxious to hear your prayers! And no one's voice sounds sweeter to God than your voice. From cover to cover, the Bible teaches that God loves to bestow blessings on His children; it is a part of His nature. He is a giving God, a blessing, encouraging, nurturing, empowering God who loves to bestow good things on His children, His favored children. That's just the nature of our God. He just keeps dispensing blessings upon blessings, giving grace after grace. As Martin Luther said, you are His favored child and He is a tender Father, so He is incredibly responsive to every concern in your life.

And knowing that ought to motivate us to pray for 2 reasons: 1st, it should remind us that God is interested in our prayers because He is supremely interested in you. And 2nd, our God is able to respond to the concerns that we bring to Him. **So, let us pray!**

Heavenly Father, I praise You! To know, because of Your promises to me in Your Son my Savior Jesus, that You do listen, that You are anxious to hear my voice, that You will be responsive; that the Holy Spirit in me will even translate and assist my struggling words. I know You are interested in my prayers because You are interested in me. I know that there is no problem that is too big for You.

Thank You for your invitation to pray, to cast my concerns, my anxieties, my fears and my cares on You knowing that You care for me. Thank you for Your promise to hear and answer my prayers and to always work all things together for my good!

Lord, too often I try to face the struggles, the problems, the brokenness, and the storms in my life by myself, by my own power and strength and ability instead of turning and trusting in You. I often try to do life the best I know how, but I keep bumping into walls and walking through wrong doors – I know I am living beneath my privilege as Your child. Too often my hands are in my pockets instead of lifted up in prayer. Lord, forgive me and strengthen me, be strong in me. Father, You know the battle that we are in with this pandemic; make the tide of this battle go Your way! Lord, in Your mercy draw up close to those who have been affected, let them sense Your closeness and presence, let them feel Your arms of love wrapped around them. You are the Great

Physician, and I am bold to pray that You would bring healing to those afflicted, that You would lead us in ways to preserve life and health. In Your comfort, bless with peace those who have lost a loved one during this pandemic. In Your mercy and grace protect the doctors, nurses, technicians and those who serve in any way in our hospitals and clinics; protect the health of the first responders – the EMTs, the Fire fighters, Law Enforcement and in our Military who are there to serve us in our time of need. And bless with wisdom those who are leading us in this battle – our local health and government officials, our Governor, our Vice-President and President.

Father, I lift these things to You, trusting in Your mercy and grace to me in Jesus! Amen.

Invitation and Prayer offered by Rev. Jon Zehnder, St. Michael's Lutheran Church, Fort Myers, FL