

The 18th Sunday after Trinity, 19 October 2025, Year C, Proper 24

Readings: Genesis 32.22-31, Psalm 121, 2 Timothy 3.14-4.5, Luke 18.1-8

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. **Amen.** (Psalm 19.14)

What is common to today's readings is the notion of persistence. Its etymology comes from Latin meaning to continue steadfastly. *Sistere* in Latin is to stand firm. In German, persistence is *Beharrlichkeit*. German synonyms for *Beharrlichkeit* are *Ausdauer*, *Hartnäckigkeit*, *Zähigkeit*, *Durchhaltevermögen*, and *Standhaftigkeit*. English synonyms are perseverance, tenacity, determination, and endurance. Other related words are doggedness, grit, and steadfastness.

Jacob wrestles with God at the Jabbok River. He persists and is rewarded. He is given a new name, Israel, and outwardly marked forever. A mark that reminds him and us that those who encounter God are marked forever inwardly. We can run from God, but Psalm 139 reminds us, should we need reminding, that just how futile an endeavour it is.

7 Where can I go from your spirit?

Or where can I flee from your presence?

8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there;

if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

9 If I take the wings of the morning

and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

10 even there your hand shall lead me,

and your right hand shall hold me fast.

11 If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me,

and the light around me become night',

12 even the darkness is not dark to you;

the night is as bright as the day,

for darkness is as light to you.

Jesus' teaching on prayer calls us, you and me, to remain persistent in prayer in the changes and chances of this world. To not give up. To continue faithful in prayer. Jesus leaves us the Parable of the Unjust Judge, who relents not because he has become just, but because he wants to be rid of the annoying widow, who keeps on petitioning him for justice. He leaves us the Parable of the Persistent Widow. Here Jesus takes an example from everyday life, saying you, my people, when it comes to prayer, you need to be like this widow, who knew her cause was just, and did not waver as she petitioned the judge that justice be done.

Over the last few years, Christians throughout the world and here at Christ Church have been praying for the release of the hostages being held in Gaza and an end to the suffering of the people in Gaza. Likewise, we have been praying for an end to the war in Ukraine and the return of the children taken by Russian troops into captivity to be reprogrammed. We have also prayed less

frequently for the Nigerian girls, mainly Christian children taken hostage by the terrorist organisation Boko Haram. We will have been asking ourselves how effective is prayer in general and ours in particular. Some might go for a minimalist approach. It maintains my/our awareness. It helps me/us to retain a level of empathy for the suffering of others, which is something important. Remain aware. Have empathy!

The former Dean of the Lutheran Cathedral in Erfurt, Germany, Heino Falcke claimed that it was small prayer groups like the one held in the Cathedral in Erfurt beginning in the 50s that were essential to the peaceful end of the Deutsche Demokratische Republik, die DDR, some thirty years later.

At the beginning of this week, we heard of and could follow the release of the hostages live, if we so wished. We witnessed expressions of joy. When it comes to claiming who was responsible for making the release of the hostages, was it our prayer and the prayer of millions of others? One voice from the world of politics would counter this suggestion.

I wonder, do we all want a piece of the cake when something goes well? Is this a divide between homo religiosus and homo politicus, the religious person and the political person? Ideally, for us as Christians, our politics are grounded in and formed by our being Christian, a new creation in Christ. How does Paul put it distinctly, "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Corinthians 5:17)

The Dean of Erfurt believed prayer was effective, making what sceptics called the 'silly claim' that prayer had something to do with the end of the DDR. The DDR, the regime, was not unlike a prison, a doghouse, or a cage. People felt trapped. There was little room to manoeuvre. This is not to say all is well in the West. We too often do not see the cages in which we have trapped ourselves, often jailer and prisoner wrapped up in one. Often, we are far less free than we think we are. It is a fundamental question, I am asking, to what extent is prayer effective? And what does "effective" mean? Are we striving to effect something or is something being effected in us? Or is it both?

Persistent prayer in Christ gives expression to our hopes, our longings, while also being a form of resistance. It is a way of resisting the pressure of the authorities to conform uncritically or the tendency of majorities of any kind as we see in the church towards Gleichschaltung. In its own quiet way, prayer is both protest and witness. In the end, the widow is given what she wanted, and justice is done. Persistent prayer, Jesus tells us, is transformative.

Earlier this week I was considering with others the critique made against Christians from within and without concerning the way you and I worship. How do we worship and pray? We do so in a disciplined way using form, structure, etc. Some vocal Christians find this suspect. It is claimed that we are just going through the motions. There is of course this danger, but in truth we pray to be changed by God's grace working within, by his Holy Spirit. In one Eucharistic prayer we pray, "Send

the Holy Spirit on your people and gather into one who all who share this One bread and One cup.” Others don’t see the point of prayer: the indifferent, the agnostics, the lazy, the ‘I can’t be bothered’. They fail to see that we are putting ourselves under the discipline of constant, persistent discipline of self-examination. We are forever learning. We are forever coming up against our own limitations, but also being challenged to use the gifts we are given to grow, to overcome, to move on, to even, yes, a favourite verb, to flourish. As an aside, how are you faring on the ‘flourishing scale’? The scale being one to ten. What is keeping you from flourishing? What are you going to do about it? Pray? Be persistent in prayer?

We said earlier that all three readings are about persisting. Jacob wrestles with God all night and is given a new name and is forever marked. He is even granted to see God face to face. Elsewhere in Scripture we are told that no one has seen God. I am not going to talk about that conundrum this morning, you may be glad to know, but to say that the Christian is able to see God captured in a phrase we may be familiar with, “In [Jesus Christ] we see our God made visible and so are caught up in the love of the God we cannot see.” We see the widow persist in her petitioning the judge, who wants to be left alone, wearing him down as we are to persist in prayer.

Finally, we turn to Paul’s Second Letter to Timothy. Paul reminds Timothy to continue in the things he has learnt, writing, “Continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.” It is a call to remain faithful, to persist in living the inheritance, the treasure that has been entrusted to Timothy and now to us, and to resist following these things that are contrary to the Gospel entrusted. With this call to persist, to remain comes a warning: a time will come... “The time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, ...”

The above diagnosis is correct, but it belongs to each and every age. Therefore, remain faithful. Persist in prayer. Give thanks for prayers “answered” and continue to pray that situations and realities can be moved even just a little. The little is not like “casting mountains into the sea” of which Jesus also speaks, but that little may be enough to bring about the change that is needed, even unknown to us, an end to hostilities. Do not close yourselves to the possibilities of prayer. Walk with them. Do not harden your hearts! Remain persistent and constant in prayer with the Church (capital C) and in your chambers as Jesus says, “But you, when you pray, go into your room, shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you”. (Matthew 6:6)

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