

You know God isn't like a vending machine, putting in this prayer, pressing this button, and getting a bag of Doritos or a healed leg. It's our human inclination to think as much, though—God is up there, listening, with the power to do whatever He wants, so we assume that we can just go to Him with close to the right words and ta-da, we've got what we want. This is how our heart wants it to work, but experience tells us otherwise, doesn't it?

Look at the service last week. We had the rails full of people coming for prayer, earnestly seeking the mercy of God to bring relief to their suffering. And knowing what each was suffering with, all you need to know is that that they weren't seeking relief from a toe that hit the kitchen table that morning; no, the prayers offered up last week were simply another cry for mercy in a long chain of prayers.

Each person up here, just like each of you down there, *are quite* like the widow Jesus speaks of. She's gone through 3 walkers, wearing out the wheels as she makes her way to and from the courthouse daily. The city knows which seat is hers in the waiting room as she now simply waits for the judge to make his way to the bathroom. She has to snag his attention in that second because he's refused her entry to the courtroom at this point, but even that can't save his weary ears from her cry for justice.

Maybe she was overtaxed and the money the government stole is what she needs to live off of. Maybe some nasty teenagers tore down her apple tree, the one joy she had in her life now that her husband is dead—the morning shade stolen from her, the fall fruits no longer to be gathered for pies and jellies and sauces. Maybe her landlord has schemed to increase her rent and on her fixed income she is going to be homeless in a month's time. We aren't told what has gone wrong, but she has been served injustice, we can be sure. And yet this judge is apathetic to her cries. He simply can't be bothered.

Now, I know I'm jumping ahead a little bit, but there's a beautiful honesty that Jesus invites us in on here. When we get to the end of the parable, we're supposed to see that God is so much better than this awful judge, and if the awful judge is finally worn down and brings

about justice, how much more so will God bring about perfect justice. But before we get there, are there not times when it feels like God is precisely like this judge? Obstinate and un-listening in spite of all our pleas, regardless of the very real suffering of His creation, His people?

I assure you that this is not the connection Jesus is pushing for; He doesn't want us to walk away knowing for a fact that God doesn't give a hoot about our prayers, not unless we annoy Him so much that He needs to do something to shut us up lest He live eternally with a splitting headache from our annoying voices. This is not the take home point.

But you're allowed to feel this way. You're allowed to be weary in your prayers, wondering if anyone is listening at all, or if the One listening truly cares. You're allowed to pray in frustration, begging for strength to persist in praying because you're getting a little bit tired of praying and being unheard. In fact, to cry out like that, to press on with a little impatience, that's to pray with the Psalms, with the Prophets, even with the saints waiting under the altar in Revelation. "How long, O Lord? I don't know how much longer I can take." If that's you're cry, know that you're in good company.

And while Jesus isn't aiming to drive home God's apathy towards your requests, Jesus is warning us of the experience that each of us must endure. He tells this parable in order that they may pray and not lose hope. He's not just urging them to take everything to God in prayer, but to note that there will be the pressure and temptation to lose hope in the midst of prayer—there will be the need to persevere in prayer.

And in this context, we're praying for justice. We're praying for God to right what we know to be wrong; for what we know He knows is wrong. We're asking for reparations for those who have been harmed; we're seeking healing for those who have fallen ill; we're seeking forgiveness and salvation for children who have fallen away, for friends that have never believed. We're coming before God on behalf of couples that can't conceive, we're seeking unity in crumbling marriages, we're pleading for protection for cities in the path of

hurricanes, we're crying for comfort for those who have lost loved ones. We aren't praying selfishly, for millions of dollars or the dream job or an easy fix to mental problems. We're asking God to right what has gone wrong in this world, in His world.

And it's not as if we concocted the idea to ask God out of nowhere, as if we awoke in the middle of the night saying "Something isn't right here, and maybe God can do something about it." No, we've been commanded and invited to come to our God, knowing that He has created the world, that His Son our Lord has redeemed His creation, and His Spirit is working to spread the hope of redemption to all.

Like the widow's only hope was the judge who refused to do his duty, our only hope is the One who has promised to hear our prayers and to take care of us, and yet it seems like we're making our way down to the courthouse for another day.

And then Jesus has the courage to wrap up the parable by assuring us that God will not delay in bringing about justice, in answering the prayers of His children who cry day and night. Not long, God? Tell that to your saints who suffer persecution, to your saints who suffer illness, to your saints who suffer their own sin, unable to escape the cycle of depravity and therefore live in grief because they don't want to live like lives offending You and hurting others. Look at your saints who suffer and cry out day and night, night and day, and tell us what soon means.

In the midst of Jesus' teaching and travelling, this parable and lesson falls as Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem, where the truest soon will take place, where the ultimate justice will be distributed. He isn't lying when He promises that God will not delay like the apathetic judge. God has planned justice before any person knew to cry out to Him for it, before any of us needed it, actually. In the scope of Jesus' life, the cross isn't delaying, and the cross will dish out justice, justice and mercy actually, as Christ assumes all our sin and suffering onto His own person and takes it into the pit of death.

This means that they have met their end; sin, sickness, and death do not get to rule over us eternally. Though it may appear they still control us now, we who, like little Herschel will be today, have been baptized into Christ, have truly been freed from their power. We simply wait for what we know to be true to be made sight at last.

We trust that God is faithful to fulfill all His promises. And to have faith in this is what Jesus asks at the end of the parable. After all is said and done, after God's children have had to persevere, after the world has mocked them for believing in a God who seems to delay unendingly, will people still have faith that God will bring about justice and make right everything that is wrong? Will they still pray each day, wrestling with God to remember His promise and bring about healing and restoration and forgiveness and provision, hoping they might get a glimpse of it today on this side of eternity?

Christ alone, through the constant reminder of Himself fulfilling justice on the cross and in the empty tomb, is able to sustain faith through all our trials, to remind us that all will be good and well in the end. And this is the greater gift that is needed.

While it would be wonderful for one prayer to be answered, for one relief to be given, the reality is we will continue to suffer, and God will, by His mysterious will, choose to delay in bringing respite to some of our deepest longings, the thorns of our flesh. To believe because one prayer is answered today would just set us up for a faith that flickers and dies because tomorrow's prayer may seemingly be ignored. But to know that justice has been served, and all will be made right, that we may suffer for a time but to do so is simply to be united with Christ our Lord who suffers with us, this is Christ carrying us to the end, this is a faith that prays all the way. This is a faith that speaks to God our hopes and hesitations, our joys and angers and even doubts. To come to Him with these honest thoughts and feelings isn't faithless but faith-full.

Because the life of faith is not an easy one, Christ hints at today. Herschel isn't being brought into a lifetime of sunshine and roses and obviously answered prayers. You know that.

He will one day soon. No, the life of faith is to know that our judge has acted, and mercifully and miraculously He has acted in our favour at the cost of His own Son, and if He has brought about such justice, we know that He is with us, even when we can't quite tell, caring for us all our days.

So, just as Jesus urges, invites, and enables you to do. Pray and don't lost heart. Justice is finished; all is made well. Your judge is merciful, loving, and hears your every word. Amen.