

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 24
Year C

Genesis 32:22-31
Psalm 121
2 Timothy 3:14-4:5
Luke 18:1-8

When I was a child, I wanted a horse. But, with all my pleadings, I never got one. It was my dream to move out west when I grew up and be a cowboy. And, to be a cowboy, I needed a horse! Never mind that we lived 3 miles from the Pacific Ocean and in a city. Perhaps my parents were a little wiser, though they were good parents. In this aspect, God is like our parents. We ask God for many things, and sometimes God has to say no. It is not that God does not love us, but God knows more than we do and knows what we really need.

In our Gospel reading, we have an amusing story of a widow coming before a judge who really doesn't care about justice, or anything else, it seems. Day after day, this woman comes to plead her case. Finally, the judge relents and gives her the judgment she requests, just to get rid of her. How does this relate to us and our pleas to God?

Many times in scripture, we read about persistence in prayer and action. In the reading from Genesis, Jacob wrestles all night long with his opponent finally ending the battle at dawn with the opponent blessing Jacob and giving him a new name. A few weeks ago, the Gospel reading gave us the story of the man who asked his neighbor for some bread so he could feed a friend who had arrived unexpectedly. Jesus said he received his answer because of his perseverance.

Many of us have experienced a time when it seemed that our prayers were not answered, in spite of our perseverance. We assailed heaven with our prayers to no avail. Does that mean our prayers were defective or that we were not good enough for God to give us our answer? No. Just like my asking for a horse, there may have been other reasons for our not receiving the answer we expected, or hoped for.

We might ask, Does prayer really work? We might think back to the hours of prayers sent heavenward on behalf of a friend who was ill. We might remember how we had prayed for someone, but they died anyway. Does God really answer prayer?

This parable which we read today is just that - a parable, not a prescription. We are told in the first verse that we are to "pray always and not lose hope." Persistence in prayer is the message. But, as we see in the last verse of this section, we are not to lose faith. We are not to give up on our faith that God does hear us.

Then, why do we not get the answer we seek? The role of prayer is not to remind God of our needs. God already knows that. We are to lift up our praise and thanksgiving, along with our laments and pleas. The Lord's Prayer might be our guide as it begins with praise and asking that

God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven before it asks for daily bread. As we ask for our needs, we are to be mindful of the needs of others. Finally, it ends with praise again.

Throughout the Bible, we read how God has tried over and over and over to get us to respond to God's message. Through the words of the prophets and the words of Jesus, we are continually reminding of God's love for us and all humanity. God's persistence is greater even than that of the widow in the parable. God has a message for us today and it is contained in the psalm we read. "I lift up my eyes to the hills. Where is my help to come? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth." As we reread this psalm, we know that God sees our coming and going. God SHALL watch over us from this time forth for evermore.

We might not get the answer we hope for, but God does hear our prayers and God does give us our needs. Will Jesus find faith when He returns? I say, yes He will!