

Sermon – 2nd August 2014
Manchi Masemola Pilgrimage,
Diocese of St. Mark the Evangelist

Text: Luke 18: 1 – 8

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, "Grant me justice against my opponent.' For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, "Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.' "And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Jesu a botša barutiwa ba gagwe seswantšho, a ba ruta gore motho o swanetše go dula a rapela le gona a sa fele pelo, a re: "Motseng wo mongwe go kile gwa ba le moahlodi wa go se hlomphe Modimo, le gona wa go nyatša batho. Gona motseng woo go be go dula mohlologadi yo mongwe yo a bego a fela a etla go yena a re: 'Hle, nke o ntamolele go motho yola a mpharago molato!' Moahlodi yoo o ile a dika a gana go mo theeletša, fela ka morago a ithetolla a re: 'Le ge Modimo ke sa mo hlomphe le batho ke ba nyatša, mohlologadi yo ke tla no mo lamolela, ka gobane šo o a nngamola. Etse ge ke sa mo lamolele o tla no boaboa mo a ba a tla a ntena.' "
Morena a iša pele a re: "Ekwang se moahlodi yoo wa go hloka toka a se boletšego. Na bjale Modimo yena a ka napa a se lamolele bao a ba kgethilego, ba ba mo lletago bošego le mosegare? A ka napa a diega go ba thuša? Ke le botša gore o tla ba lamolela ka pela. Fela Morwamotho mohla a etla afa le re o tla hwetša go sa na le ba ba nago le tumelo mo lefaseng?"

There are times when we are like the widow in this parable. We know what we need, but we have to keep going in the direction of getting what we need through prayer. We cannot be in control of things beyond our control. Which is why we need God's help because God has power over all things. So, how often or how many times do we pray for God's help with those things?

THE FREQUENCY OF PRAYER

When we talk about the word "*frequent*" or "*frequency*" we are talking about the number of times something happens. The more the widow in our text prayed, it is the more she increased her visits to the court house to beg this judge, so that justice should be done in her case. We are not told the circumstances of her adversary (enemy) or how that adversary was oppressing her. But, we are told that this oppression is unjust. She bothered this judge over and over again to get the justice

that she was entitled to, but also deprived of. The help that she needed was at the mercy of this judge.

Let us consider the plight of widows in general during the days of Jesus's earthly ministry. As we know, women had sort of a second-class status in that day. This widow had no husband or a son standing with her in court to help her plead her case for justice. Her case was obviously in the realm of the Gentile court system, because under Jewish law, cases were taken before an elder in a Jewish context and not a public court system.

William Barclay notes, "*...under Jewish law one man could not constitute a court. What usually happened was that the plaintiff chose an arbitrator and the defendant chose another and then a third was appointed who would act as chairman and who would have the casting vote.*" She had to fight for what was hers as a Jew in a Gentile court system without the aid and advice of a lawyer.

The element of longsuffering that proved to be in her favor was her *frequency* of prayer. She had no advantage or advocate in her favor. She was on her own to plead her case. The judge would not hear her. But, she would not remain silent. Jesus tells us that this judge cared neither for a person nor God.

The court system that the widow went to for justice was a corrupt system. There were complainants who would stand outside the courtroom disputing as to who should have preference. The more astute complainants whispered to the secretaries and paid bribes that were not called bribes but "fees". When the greed of one of these secretaries had been gratified, they would whisper to the judge who would promptly call the case.

"The judges were called Dayyena Gezeroth, which means judges of prohibitions or punishments. But because of how corrupt these judges had become they were now called Dayyena Gezeloth which means a thief judge."

Now if you think about this system, its corruption and the widow's helplessness, you get the idea that she seemed hopeless. Hopeless though she may have been, she was also **persistent**.

Barclay notes that the widow epitomizes symbolically those that were both poor and defenseless. What is striking about this widow was not the fact that she was a potential victim of exploitation as widows often were and are, but that she publicly and persistently cried out for justice. Despite how desperate she was, she would not resort to bribery. The motivation behind her reasoning in refusing to resort to bribery was for one or two reasons. Number one, she refused to degrade herself by following a corrupt way to obtain what was just, even if she had the money to do so. Number two, as a widow; she was somewhat poor to begin with.

THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER

Manchi Masemola was persistent, she was persistent in her quest to worship God with other believers, despite the physical and emotional pain she received from her family; she found ways to connect with others and with God.

Sometimes people might be persistent but not sincere. St. Augustine once prayed for purity but also said “ *not yet.*” His prayer was not sincere. He was praying for purity (cleanliness) before he really desired it. However, later on, as we know from what history tells us, St. Augustine did one day have that prayer answered, but only when he meant it from the heart as he went on to become one of the most influential church leaders of the western world in the fourth century.

Another necessity of prayer is that we do our part in helping our prayers to get answered. The woman did not have the option of sitting back and watching things fall apart. It was necessary for her to go and plead her case before this judge over and over again because otherwise her plight would not have been known. She was her only advocate, which necessitated that she speaks on her own behalf in order to get the justice from the oppression of her adversary.

James 4: 2 makes the point that we do not always have what we need because we do not always ask God for it in prayer. And James 4: 3 says when we do ask for something but do not receive, it is because we are asking with the wrong motives.

THE REWARD OF PRAYER

The widow’s persistence paid off, like it did with *Manchi*. We are gathered here today because Manchi didn’t give up, to the point that her baptism was not with water but with her own blood. The widow in the text even after being turned away so many times, it seems that she would have give up and resigned to accept her fate and either lose some or all she had. Regardless of what her situation was, it was obviously that what she needed was genuine justice...*justice that would truly be just*. Though she may have gotten frustrated, she never quit being persistent until she made sure that her case was heard and justice was granted. **Instead of the judge wearing her down by refusing to help, she wore him down by refusing to give up.**

Unlike the unjust, ungodly judge, God cares for us far beyond our ability to comprehend. God knows what you and I are in need of and God wisely answers our prayers according to His will. God can see things from an all-knowing (omniscient) point of view. God cares about our well being, unlike the sentiments of the unjust judge in this story who cared neither for a person nor God.

The lesson from this parable is that, if this arrogant unjust and ungodly judge can be worn down to answering the prayers of a widow who seemed insignificant to him, then how much more will God who cares for us answer our prayers in accordance with His will as to what is best for us. The unjust judge saw that he was going to have to yield to her in order to have peace.

There was nobody that she could bribe, nor did she have the money for a bribe. She did the only thing that she could which was to be *persistent, trusting God* and *continue to pray*. God knows the number of hairs on our heads (Matthew 10:29 - 31). God even knows us all by name (John 10: 3). God even knows what we are in need of even before we pray (Matthew 6:8).

As we commemorate and celebrate the life and witness of *Manchi Masemola*, let us remember that God does answer prayers. We need to stop being impatient and give up the first time things don’t go according to our plan.

Limpopo, South Africa, Africa and the world is desperate of men and women of faith who will pray without ceasing, who are persistent in seeking justice and service delivery from those authorized to do so. As *Manchi Masemola* rests in peace, we are required to continue to make God's reign and will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We have on our side God who has not given up on His creation, God who is not deaf to our prayers and requests; God who is still in business of answering prayers and working out miracles. AMEN