

## Worship Service *“Persistent”*

Pentecost 19, Year C, 16th October, 2022

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5 CEV / Luke 18:1-8 NSRV

### Prelude

Opening Music      [Guide My Feet](#)      African American Spiritual,  
performed by the First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn Choir at NYU, 2009.

### Welcome Guests / Announcements

### Pass the Peace

Opening Music      *Sweet Hour of Prayer*      11

### Call to Worship [responsive]

One: I lift my eyes up to the mountains, from where does my help come?

**All: My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.**

One: We look not to the mountains or valleys, even heaven or earth,

**All: For God is found among us.**

One: Wherever two or three are gathered in Christ’s name,

**All: God is here among us.**

One: Come, let us worship the God of Creation, the God of People,  
the God of Community.

**All: Let us follow Jesus, for Jesus is The Way. Let us worship together in faith.**

### Invocation

God of love and justice, we gather together to worship you: to offer our thanks and praise and to proclaim your goodness and mercy.

Meet us here. Breathe your Word into our souls;  
engrave your covenant of love upon our hearts. Teach us faithfulness and compassion  
so that our lives may reflect  
your love and justice to the world. **Amen.**

2 Timothy 3:14—4:5, Christ The Judge A weekly bible reading, from the lectionary, narrated by Douglas Brown. Text from CEV : the Contemporary English Version Copyright © 1991, 1992, 1995 by American Bible Society. Used by Permission. Pictures from commons.wikimedia.org

Keep on being faithful to what you were taught and to what you believed. After all, you know who taught you these things.

Since childhood, you have known the Holy Scriptures that are able to make you wise enough to have faith in Christ Jesus and be saved.

Everything in the Scriptures is God's Word. All of it is useful for teaching and helping people and for correcting them and showing them how to live.

The Scriptures train God's servants to do all kinds of good deeds.

When Christ Jesus comes as king, he will be the judge of everyone, whether they are living or dead. So with God and Christ as witnesses, I command you

to preach God's message. Do it willingly, even if it isn't the popular thing to do. You must correct people and point out their sins. But also cheer them up, and when you instruct them, always be patient.

The time is coming when people won't listen to good teaching. Instead, they will look for teachers who will please them by telling them only what they are itching to hear.

They will turn from the truth and eagerly listen to senseless stories.

But you must stay calm and be willing to suffer. You must work hard to tell the good news and to do your job well.

## **A Time of Prayer**

### **Joys and Concerns**

#### **Pastoral Prayer**

People of God, as we come to prayer let us remember that we do not have to twist the arm of a reluctant God to seek good things for this world, nor find ways to persuade a distant God to come near and listen to us.

Let us remember that as we pray we kneel alongside Jesus Christ, in the presence of God, with the help of the Spirit.

So let us bring to mind now those people who are in need of our prayers: those who are ill, or anxious; those who are lonely or sad; those who are despairing or defeated; those who are hungry or homeless; those whose relationships are breaking apart; those who are bullied or abused; those who cannot find work; and those who are



groups a number of years ago. When Senator Elizabeth Warren's objections to the confirmation of Attorney General candidate Jeff Sessions were officially silenced by the Senate, the Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell said she was warned to cease her objections, "nevertheless she persisted." That then became a rallying cry for the burgeoning Women's March movement.

This morning's texts are all about persistence, about holding fast to the course no matter how rough the ride gets. Jesus relates a story of a widow who continued to seek justice from an uncaring judge who didn't respect anybody. Yet her persistence becomes such an irritation to him, that he grants her justice just to get some peace.

History abounds with those who have persisted seeking justice. People like: Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr., who persisted against the injustice of segregation and racism; Mahatma Gandhi who persisted against the injustice of British oppression in India; and Archbishop Oscar Romero who persisted in speaking out about the injustice of civil war on the poor and marginalized of El Salvador.

Some of these, like our widow in our story today, realized some success and resolution, though it should be pointed out that three of the four met their end by an assassin's bullet. The widow in our story today knows what it is to suffer injustice. After all, she's someone in the margins of Jesus' day. Without a male relative to act on her behalf, she cannot pursue any means of resolution in the normal day-to-day business or honor systems of her culture. Her only recourse is to petition the courts if she is not being treated fairly and rely on seeking justice in that arena. And her persistence is rewarded, if for no other reason than the sheer annoyance and irritation her persistence has caused. Jesus uses this illustration to point out that if persistence can spur an uncaring, callous human judge to action, how much easier will it be to get divine interaction from a caring, loving God who wants to provide for us.

Jesus teaches to take our issues to our Creator who will quickly provide justice to us. Those are definitely words of hope for those who yearn for justice under the yolk of oppression and poverty, as many of Jesus' audience were all too familiar with. But is that the reality we see? How does that play out in our observations and life experiences? Often it seems as though the unjust judges of this world and those that benefit from their rulings, seem to do as well as, if not better than those who cry out to God and patiently wait for a divine word or action. The rich seem to die comfortably in their satin-sheeted beds while the homeless die whimpering in the street. We live in a world where children die senselessly, natural disasters take thousands of innocent lives, and millions suffer and die from violence, hunger, and neglect, around the world and in our own country.

It can beg the question, where is the God who unlike the unjust judge, provides justice quickly? Unfortunately, when we ponder this question, it can be all too easy to try to justify God's apparent inaction on some fault or shortcoming of those who cry out for relief. Particularly those of us who have spent most of our lives benefiting from the relative security of a white, middle class existence can have a hard time understanding how people can find themselves mired in such dire circumstances. It can be tempting to suppose that

they must be paying for their own moral shortcomings in some way, that they are in need of repentance for the sinful transgressions that is the cause of their lot in life.

There are certainly plenty of voices to be heard today promoting such perspectives. We hear of all the “bad hombres” seeking sanctuary on our shores from the brutal violence and poverty of their homelands. And on the flip side, we have others promoting a theology that says if you aren’t rich and successful, then you aren’t faithful enough, that you need to pray harder and live purer lives then you too will reap the financial rewards of your faith.

Paul warns Timothy in our first reading today of those types of false teachers, who will tell people what they want to hear, something that gets them off the hook from living the lives of witness they are called to, voices that make the status quo legitimate and require nothing more of the faithful. Yet we still are faced with the same question, does prayer really work? Well, there are two points I’d like us to consider. First, is prayer just a request line to God to solve all our problems or is there more to it?

C.S. Lewis once said, “I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. Prayer doesn’t change God, it changes me.” To pray effectively, to truly give our concerns to God, can have a profound effect. When we stop trying to manage the problem and trying achieve the solution we ourselves have devised, and put our trust in God, not only do we unload the stress and worry, we are also open to other possibilities that we may have never remotely considered.

The second thought I’d like us to consider is our call to persist in faithful action as well. In 2 Timothy, Paul counsels Timothy to keep the faith by maintaining his preaching and witness, even if it’s not the popular thing to do, even if it leads to finding yourself in the minority, in the margins.

There are many ways to witness to a gospel based on love and justice for all, not just a call to ministerial evangelism and preaching like Timothy. As we try to reconcile the promise of a God who will provide justice with the reality of the multitudes, who unlike the widow, go to their graves without receiving justice, maybe the answer we seek is found not in what we should expect from God, but rather how we struggle, as did the widow, for justice, even in the hopelessness of not seeing that justice in our lifetime. Rather than waiting for God to meet our needs, are we not called to do justice for, and meet the needs of the disenfranchised among us, to meet the needs of others?

You’ve heard me say many times before, we are the body of Christ in a very literal sense. Rather than waiting for a miracle from God, are we called to be the miracle for which others are praying? Make no mistake, to be persistent in seeking justice can be exhausting, and disheartening as well, especially in the time in which we live. It can seem like we are lone voices in the wilderness, and there seems to be no impact to our efforts. Hopeless as it may seem at times, we are called to be persistent in seeking justice, not because it is easy or because in the end we will win; we are called to seek justice, regardless of the consequences, for the sake of justice.

Martin Luther King, Jr. once said that “the arc of time is long, but it bends towards justice.” It has been said that persistence is like wrestling a gorilla. You don’t quit when you get tired. You quit when the gorilla gets tired.

I pray we never cease praying and never tire of the persistence of faith we are called to. May we strive to be the change God intends us to be in this world, and perhaps even the answer to prayers of others. Amen.

## A Call to Serve

God’s justice is persistent in affecting change and invites us to be liberal and tenacious in our giving. Let us bring gifts to further justice and peace wherever they are desired and needed. Let these resources be used to facilitate a just peace for all. Amen.

## A Time for Reflection [Video] [Never Give Up](#)

*You Raise Me Up*, performed by Berend Deysel, *Immergroen Treffers*, © 2014 Next Music Released on: 2014-06-17 Music Publisher: Peer Music Music Publisher: Universal Music Publishers, written by Brendan Graham, Rolf Lovland , 2002 Universal - Polygram International Publishing, Inc. (Admin. by Universal Music Publishing Group) Peermusic III, Ltd., posted to YouTube by Connie Lynne, CCLI Song #4434612 , used and reported under CCLI Streaming License 20261246

## The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Generous God, through your Son, Jesus Christ, you have shown us what it means to love. And you call us to follow Your example— to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

Continue to write your law of love on our hearts. Give us an unwavering passion for justice, and a tenacious faith that will not rest until the hungry are fed, the oppressed find relief, and the outsider finds a welcome. **Amen.**

**Hymn** *For the Healing of the Nations* **367**

## Benediction

**Go now, awakened to the voice of God** who speaks in his Word and his world. As you leave this place, be listening amid the noise of your everyday life. Be persistent, for the One whom you follow is not dead, nor are his teachings and his promises. Don’t get discouraged. Keep asking ... seeking ... knocking, for times of receiving, finding, and opening will come. Christ Jesus is alive. Be alive in him, the Word written upon your heart, always there. Amen.

## Postlude