

My maternal grandmother, Annie, was 4'9" with size 2 feet, a sharp tongue and no filter. She lived with us when I was a child and she was utterly terrifying. The wider family still talks about the "Annie" effect but now, of course, we can laugh about how this tiny woman could cut anybody down to size and make grown men quake in their boots. My brother and I were very careful not to ask our parents for anything if our gran was in earshot because she'd butt in with one of her favourite sayings:

"Those who don't ask don't want,
and those who ask don't get!"

In other words, there's no point wasting your breath asking for something because you're not going to get it! Fortunately our loving Heavenly Father isn't a bit like my grandmother – he wants us to go to him and speak to him – He wants to hear our voice. He wants us to pray and never give up! As he doesn't give up on us. Though of course prayer isn't just about going to God because we want to ask for something, with a list of requests like a shopping list. It's being open **with** God and open **to** God – sharing our lives with him every step of the way – enabling a two-way conversation as we go, listening as well as speaking.

Jesus encourages his disciples, us, to be persistent in prayer, to persevere and not give up – though that can be really hard. Sometimes we may feel as if God is absent, he's not listening. I wonder how many prayers are being said at the moment earnestly pleading for God's help and assistance in the current situation? But, for example, think of flour that's currently really hard to get hold of. Do we see one empty shelf and never bother to look for flour again, or give up trying to order it with our online shop if we've tried once and failed? No – we're on a mission! We keep searching and searching until we find it.

With dogged determination – we persevere.

This passage from Luke's Gospel comes as Jesus and his disciples are making their way to Jerusalem where Jesus knows he is going to die. He will be leaving them and they need lots of encouragement to keep going.

In the previous chapter Jesus had warned them that they would face temptations and challenges and that there would be uncertain times, and so, in verse 9 the disciples ask Jesus to increase their faith.

And remember that, like the mustard seed, faith can grow.

Jesus says in Chapter 17 that growing faith involves recognition that we're not worthy, that we should bring gratitude and praise to God and that we should keep an eternal perspective.

And now, in Chapter 18, Jesus teaches that growing faith also involves perseverance in prayer - not losing heart, not giving up

As God doesn't give up on us.

In a way this is both realistic and reassuring.

Jesus knows that life can get difficult –

we may get disillusioned, stop praying and give up.

We may think we're the only person who has dips in our faith, when we wonder if God is really there, if he hears our prayers, but we're not!

This is comforting because it's normal and can happen to anybody.

Faith is a journey and, as I know myself, it's not always easy.

We all have ups and downs in our faith.

We all have times when we feel close to God and times when God can feel very distant – or we dare to actually wonder if he's there at all.

Hang on in there – persevere – don't lose heart and don't give up – because God is there, and he's listening.

As Corporal Jones would say, "Don't panic!".

Jesus knows that he is soon going to be leaving his disciples and he knows that he will come back, in what we call the Second Coming – the Parousia.

His disciples thought Jesus would come back soon but Jesus knew otherwise.

Jesus understands that his followers will have difficulties in this interim period of waiting - how we may be feeling, how there would be apparent silences and problems, persecutions, temptations and injustices.

How are we going to manage?

How, as his disciples asked, can our faith grow so we can cope?

We're told the unjust judge in this passage from Luke neither feared God nor cared about men.

In other words he did his own thing and he lacked compassion.

He was absolutely the wrong man for the job.

In those days if any crime was committed the accuser had to take their adversary to court –

there wasn't a police force or a CPS to do it for you –

and the judge was the person who alone would make the decision, pass judgement, coming down on one side or the other.

The widow pleads for justice – we don't know what has happened to her and we can't necessarily assume she was of advanced years.

It's worth remembering that this was a man's world.

A widow was vulnerable and needed protection –

when her husband died she looked to her father, if he was still alive, or to her son, if she had one, to protect her and take care of her, failing that her husband's brother.

But this widow is alone and she needs help.

There are about a 100 mentions of widows and orphans in the Bible, because their vulnerability, their need of care and protection is so important to God, who cares about all his children.

Women weren't even regarded as reliable witnesses and could rarely give evidence in court.

Which is why Jesus' attitude to women was so refreshing and why it was so powerful that women were the first witnesses to the empty tomb on Resurrection Day.

The unjust judge eventually gives in.

Not because he cares about the widow and her pleas for justice but because he cares about himself.

She literally wears him down, she keeps coming back, nagging him, hassling him, embarrassing him, being a right pain,

until he eventually gives in –
not because he cares about her, or about justice,
but because he wants an easy life, he wants her off his back.

This, of course, is a parable.

Jesus was the master storyteller and he told parables, to teach –
Memorable stories that carry important truths.

This is a compare and contrast parable.

We can identify with the widow.

Like her we are weak, powerless, helpless and need rescuing by a
Saviour.

But the unjust judge is nothing like God – he's the polar opposite.

Our God is loving, compassionate, forgiving – he's the God of justice.

If persistence can wear even the unjust judge down,

how much more will our loving heavenly father dispense justice to those
who belong to him.

When we're struggling it can be helpful to go back to basic truths.

We know what our God is like, what his nature is, because of what we
know about him in Holy Scripture and when we look at Jesus who tells
us in John 4:9

“When you have seen me you have seen the father”.

Take a look at Exodus 34 verse 6, when God is speaking to Moses.

“The Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, is slow to anger,
abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and
forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty
unpunished”.

So God is loving, patient, forgiving and he's JUST!

I'm sure there are things that are troubling us right now that we feel are
really unjust, really unfair, politically, ecologically, financially.

We may feel that people have wronged us and have got away with it.

Injustice can be personal and it can be very painful.

And at the moment there are so many things that seem so unfair:

For example – and this could be a very long list!

People are, isolated, frightened, lonely, dying alone, grieving alone,
worried about employment, finance, and the future,

What the new normal will be like

It's so important that we keep bringing these things to God in prayer, asking for his help.

We read in verse 7: "Will not God give justice – fairness - to his elect, who cry to him day and night."

Jesus backs this up with a promise in Verse 8.

God will see that they get justice, and quickly. He will judge those who persecute, abuse, ridicule and destroy the righteous.

God will defend his people.

Justice, fairness, will be done.

Sometimes we can feel as if we've been praying for something for ever!

It doesn't feel very quick.

We need to be patient – and keep praying –

for we are assured that God hears our prayers.

But we need to keep an eternal perspective.

We're told in 2 Peter Chapter 3:

"With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

Jesus, on his way to Jerusalem, is days away from the cross.

Jesus, God the Son, dying on the cross, is the place where justice is done and where injustice is dealt with.

All of our sin and rebellion is taken care of in that one momentous act.

But there's a proviso –

we need to remember that God's justice isn't automatic.

As it says in John 3 verse 16, Andrew's favourite verse, that

"whoever believes in him, will not perish but will have eternal life."

All those who belong to him, believe in him, will live with him for ever.

That's why it's so important that we share our faith,

introduce people to Jesus, why Alpha courses are so helpful,

that we demonstrate our faith in our behaviour,

in the way we relate to and care for others.

Because faith can also fizzle out when people don't think it's important enough to share – to pass on. If Christian faith hadn't been passed

down the generations in the 2000 years or so since Jesus came the first time, we wouldn't be here now, worshipping and praising him, calling ourselves Christians.

And in the meantime, we need to have faith to get us through while we're waiting for Jesus to return.

2000 years and counting!

Jesus is coming back and will bring ultimate justice.

Will he find faith, or will we have given up?

Because if we stop praying it's as if we're saying there's no point – God isn't there, he doesn't exist so we're wasting our time.

When we pray we are showing that we have faith – faith and prayer are interlinked.

Don't give up on God – because, thankfully, he doesn't give up on us!

Jesus is asking when I return will you be ready for me?

Will you be constantly watchful, and prayerful, or will you have given up?

For what we do reflects what we believe.

If we give up praying it's as if we're saying we don't believe God is there – we don't believe that what Jesus is telling us is true.

But if we cry out, shout, wail, to God day and night it's not because we think we've got to wake him up,

we pray because we believe he's listening and can act –

we are demonstrating that we have faith –

that we haven't given up on God as he hasn't given up on us..

So - keep praying. Keep praying for justice – for fairness.

Remember that we find justice in Jesus and that ultimate justice is coming when he returns to establish His Kingdom and right all wrongs.

There will be a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness, justice, fairness, is guaranteed.

AMEN.