

October 17, 2010
Luke 18:1-8

Hold On!

When I found out I was going to be a father, I started thinking about all the good things I wanted for my son. I wanted him to learn how to eat healthily – real food, not junk. I wanted him to be friendly, kind, polite, generous and loving; confident and unafraid in the world. I wanted him most of all to know the LORD and to love God and all people in gentleness and humility. The list goes on, expressing my love, care and desire for my children to live in and grow in the good gifts of God's gracious providence and love. Of course, it goes without saying that I would feed, clothe, shelter and love this child.

And it felt good to imagine what a wonderful parent I would be and how rewarding it would be to shape and form these children into healthy, happy followers of Jesus.

Then, the real kids showed up – living breathing children with personalities, wills and ideas of their own. I remember one night when my son was just a hungry, screaming baby. He cried. I heated his bottled and wondered why he couldn't just hold on, trust that his food was coming. I was his Dad, after all, and I was on the job. I even told him so: "Shhhh. Hold on. It's coming. Daddy's got everything you need." Now, he still cries to let me know what he wants. Now, however, what he wants rarely looks like those things I thought best for him. He's persistent though. And so is his brother. Often, they get their way.

I find it striking how much this strange dance we do as parents and children, so full of mistrust and misunderstandings, misconnections and missed communication, feels so much like our relationship with our heavenly Father, especially as we live out that relationship in prayer.

And this story Jesus tells about the persistent widow and the arrogant judge seems at first reading to teach us that if we cry hard enough for long enough God will eventually give in and give us what we want. We live and talk as if that is the way it works. We imagine God to be unmovable, unchangeable, unhearing or unfeeling an abstract adversary to be worn down on some occasions, buttered up, flattered or persuaded on other occasions.

With this story, Jesus reveals our mistaken thoughts on God. Yet, as he uncovers our misconceptions about God's rule, Jesus also shows us God's true and loving heart. Not the unfeeling judge who rules in isolation, but a good and generous God who painstakingly works out his good intentions for us. At the heart of this story is the argument that asks us to rethink how we live in relationship with God: What do we imagine God is like? What do we expect God wants for us? What do we think we need to do to get God to act?

Jesus says – if we can fight and struggle and protest, protest and petition and struggle some more to get just this tiny amount of change for the better, just this small little bit of

justice out of these corrupt and inhuman systems that seem to rule our lives and planet; if we can, even here and now, get a little righteousness enacted, a little relief for the widow and orphan, a little of life's blessings for the least; then think of *how much more* God hears, listens, answers and acts on behalf of his beloved children. God reigns not as a cruel, unmovable judge sitting high above, removed from us all. God reign comes to us as the Christ, Jesus, on the cross; the servant king, Jesus, who suffers and dies so that we might know God's heart and intention to give us life, love and all that is good in this world and the next. God reigns among us as Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead so that we too might live in God through a relationship of love and trust.

We think God is like this judge in Jesus' story, but then we come to know God in Jesus Christ. In learning Jesus, we can start to imagine a God who changes, who listens, answers and acts, a God working even now to bring about the righteous justice we need in this world.

But now, as we cry out to him day and night – “Come quickly, Lord” – Jesus replies, “Hold on.” Hold on in faith, hope and love with a persistence that trusts that God who raised Jesus from the dead will bring about all that he wills for us and for our planet. Hold on. Persist in this relationship.

We persist in prayer: the kind of prayer where we listen as much as we speak, receive as much as we give. In prayer, God opens our hearts and minds to know his own heart and plans and desires for us. In life lived in prayer, we can imagine ourselves in partnership with God, adversaries no longer.

Funny, yet sad story: This summer we vacationed in Lancaster, PA. One of those days, the boys got it in their head that today would be the day we should go mini golfing. That is something we were planning to do on the trip, and that day seemed a good day to us too. So, we said, “Yes, today we will go mini golfing today, but you must be a little patient. We have lots of other great things planned for today. We'll have to see how the day goes, but we will go mini golfing maybe and even more than once.” The boys squealed, “Yeah!” But no sooner had we got into the car than they started crying because we weren't going mini golfing. We drove. It took too long. We stopped for food. It took too long. The course was crowded, and we debated whether or not we should just wait till the afternoon. They cried. At one point, I lost my temper and yelled, “Yes, we're going mini golfing. If you don't stop crying, though, we won't.” It was an idle threat. We would go mini golfing. They just had to trust us and hold on. Eventually, we mini-golfed and then we went to an amusement park and mini-golfed again and went to a waterpark.

Just think, if we flawed and sinful parents that we may be can have such good and wonderful things planned for us and for our children to delight in each others company – imagine *how much more*, our heavenly Father has in store for His beloved children. Just ask him, again and then hold on ... in Jesus name. Amen.