

I will never forget the time I visited Francis Krogstad. I was a young pastor – I had only been a pastor about five years. She was an elderly woman who had just become a resident of the local nursing home. I had visited her before when she was in her own home – she was a proud woman – always took care to fix her hair and put on make-up. But on that day she was lying in her bed, hair disheveled – clothes wrinkled. I gave her a pep talk that day – told her she could do fine in this nursing home. I told her she needed to try harder – not to give up hope. As I left the room I remember feeling like I had really done a good thing – I told her she could do it and I was sure she could.

She died the next morning.

Jesus told the story of a widow and an unjust judge. He was no good – he did not care about people nor did he fear God. The widow wanted justice from him – she kept coming to him demanding that he grant her justice. But he did not. Now a friend might have told her, “Let it go. Don’t work yourself up over this. If you keep on going to that judge and demanding justice you are just going to irritate him. Let it be.”

But she did not let it go until finally the judge 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 her continual coming.”

Then Jesus said, “Listen to what the judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? I tell you he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet when the Son of man comes will he find faith on earth?”

How many times have we prayed for peace in the world? And for people who are hungry? For children that are abused? For healing? Maybe God is not tired about hearing about these things but do you grow weary when we pray and pray and nothing changes?

Lately I have been praying for Mary. Day after day praying for Mary. She has cancer that has eaten away some of her bones – not so long ago they put in some pins so that she could still move about. I pray for help for her –

healing sometimes – other times that she would be able to cope. I pray for her husband, her children. I do not think I really expect her to be healed.

Is it like that for you sometimes – praying but no longer really expecting? Peace in the Middle East? An end to hunger? Should we lower our standards – pray for those things we might more reasonably expect to happen? Safety for the soldiers we know? God showing us how we can do our part to help those in need?

The first lesson today is an outrageous story. If it were not already in the Bible people would say it is impossible. But when I opened my two New International Versions of the Bible there it was printed in the heading: Jacob Wrestles God.

Jacob wrestles God. Try to understand that – a human in hand to hand combat with the creator of the universe. And even more – Jacob is given a new name, Israel, meaning the one who strives with God. What an interesting name for God's people – the one who strives with God - wrestles with God.

It seems like Jesus is encouraging us to do just that to keep on seeking justice from God – food for the hungry, peace for the nations, health for the sick – from God. Not to settle for what is reasonable but to be like the widow and like Jacob – entering into a struggle for what is good and what is right and not giving up. Even if our prayers are meant with silence and nothing is changed, to cry out day and night to God and not giving up.

Jesus asked a question of us all – “When the son of Man comes will he find faith on earth?” Will we fight for healing or will we settle for disease? Will we seek justice for the poor or will we give up hope that anything will ever be different?

The widow did not simply wish for justice for herself – she went to the place where justice could be given. And we?

It is too easy to give up. To make peace with all that is wrong with the world. That is what I was afraid Francis was doing. I did not want that for her.

But at one moment in our life we will be dying tomorrow. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem when he spoke these words to his disciples – on his way to suffering and the cross. Though he prayed not once but three times that the cup of suffering might not be his to drink he drank that cup to the very bottom.

The cross was not the answer to his prayer but it certainly was the answer to ours. For through his dying forgiveness and salvation were won for us.

Until the day of our salvation we will wrestle with God. We will pray for God's victory in this world – for health and peace and every good thing. We will pray that God will use us to make our prayers come true.