

Encouraging YOU to know JESUS

*In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song.*

Please note that our Interim Moderator and Locum, Rev. Rona Young, will be visiting those with pastoral needs by telephone during the Covid-19 pandemic. If in need of pastoral care, please contact Rona by telephone on (01292) 471982.

The Minister's Message

Reflection "Persevering Prayer"

Bible reading **Luke 18: 1 – 8**

The parable of the persistent widow

1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.
2 He said: 'In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. 3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, "Grant me justice against my adversary."
4 'For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, "Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!"'
6 And the Lord said, 'Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?'

As we know, Jesus' disciples never asked him, "Teach us how to do miracles, or to teach or how to love people," but as they watched him, they said, "*Lord, teach us how to pray.*"

In Luke 18:1 we heard that "*Jesus told them a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.*"

The Parable of the Persistent Widow is a parable for all those who, at one time or another, **have felt like giving up.**

Other parables tell us about the nature of the Kingdom of God: The Kingdom is to be our highest priority: for example, there is the farmer who finds hidden treasure in a field, and sells everything in order to possess it.

The Kingdom is to be our greatest joy: there is the woman who sweeps the whole house until she finds the lost silver coin, and how she rejoices when it is found.

And the Kingdom is forever growing: the tiny mustard seed, insignificant when it is planted, becomes the largest tree of all, and the birds come and make their nests in its branches.

But this parable is different. It does not speak about the Kingdom itself, but about the nature of life in the Kingdom.

First of all, there is the unjust judge. *“He neither feared God nor cared about men.”* Therefore, he was clearly not a Jewish Judge as all ordinary Jewish disputes were not heard in the public courts. This judge must have been paid by Herod or the Romans. Unless the person who brought the case before the judge had influence or money to bribe their way to a verdict in their favour, then this person – or in this case this widow – had no hope of their case ever being settled. He was a powerful man and not accountable to anyone.

Secondly, there was the widow. As widows were in these days, she was powerless. But here and on other occasions too, Jesus honours widows and severely judged those who took advantage of them. Jesus honoured the widow he saw in the temple, giving her only two very small copper coins - all that she had to live on.

In this parable, possibly this widow had someone trying to cheat her out of some of the money, or the land that her husband had left her. She knew that she had some rights, and brings her case before the judge to vindicate her.

She might have been intimidated by the court, but she did not let that stop her. She was indeed a remarkable woman. The judge puts her off – he had no time for such an insignificant person, so he sent her away, but she came back again and again and again.

In the end the judge said, *“Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming.”*

So, what does this mean? We heard at verse 6 that Jesus says he is an unjust judge, and he helps her only because of her persistence. This woman could have given up as others would in her situation, but she carried on.

I read about a man who distributed tracts at a street corner for many years. Finally, and seeing no visible results, he gave up. When he returned to the same place two years later, he saw another person giving out Gospel leaflets as he had done.

Striking up a conversation, he discovered the man had become a Christian through a tract that he had given to him on that corner two years before.

The man said, *“Many times I came back to find the earnest person and thank him, but he never returned. I decided that he must have died and so I have taken his place.”*

The man suddenly realised that his work had not been in vain and so, much encouraged, he went back to giving out tracts the next day.

There is an old hymn entitled, *“Jesus good above all other,”* and the last line of the first verse is, ***“Give us grace to persevere.”***

One of the best-known chapters in the Bible is Hebrews 11. It begins, *“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”* This verse has meant a great deal to me over the years.

The writer to the Hebrews then writes about Abel, Noah, Abraham and Moses, all people who refused to give up when hard times came.

Paul too showed great perseverance. In chapter 11 of his 2nd letter to the Corinthians he says, *“Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was ship-wrecked, I spend a day and a night in the open sea.”* I think we might well have given up if we had to go through just one of these things.

I wonder how you are all feeling about having to persevere just now. Despite the vaccinations, this lockdown seems to be going on and on. However, **we are called to persevere, to hold on to our faith.**

This widow is a very good example of what faith is all about. The purpose of this parable is given in verse 1, *“To show them that they should always pray and not give up.”* Jesus knew that the disciples would be witnesses to, or have to participate in, his betrayal, denial, unjust conviction, beating, humiliation, crucifixion and death.

They must have been frightened, but Jesus said there was another way – the way of courage and faith. These two words seem to go together. In Deuteronomy 31:8 Moses says to Joshua, *“Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”*

The last verse of this parable has a question, *“When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”* He will indeed find faith on earth – if we do not give up. We are called to persevere, even during these long days of this pandemic.

There is too much at stake for us to do anything else. The Kingdom depends upon each and every one of us.

Amen.



Prayer

Let us pray,

Gracious God,

we thank you that you are always at work, striving to fulfil your purpose – not just the course of history, but equally in each of our lives. We are all precious in your sight, and of infinite importance.

We thank you for the ways that you have changed us so that, despite our lack of faith and our many faults, you are constantly at work within us making us a new creation.

Loving God,

sometimes we lose sight of your transforming power, especially in these long days of lockdown, when we are tired of the same routine day after day. Help us we pray, to persevere and not give up, to hold onto our faith and not be discouraged knowing that, when we turn to you in prayer, you will strengthen and uphold us.

We ask your blessing on Newton Wallacetown Church, and although we cannot meet together in fellowship we are still united spiritually through our online services and the Extraordinary Times.

We are unable to visit those who have been bereaved or who are ill, but we are able to telephone those in need, and to remember them in prayer.

We ask your blessing on Aileen Morrison in the Biggart Hospital, on Donald Grant and others we know who are ill at this time. Bless too, Loving Father, those who have been bereaved in recent days and weeks. May they know your love and your peace in their hearts.

We pray for who are or have been ill with Covid and pray once again for everyone in the NHS and other key-workers doing everything they can, despite feelings of exhaustion. We give you thanks that many people have now received their vaccination in this area.

Living God,

Help us, we pray, to encourage and support one another. Revive in us a picture of your Kingdom and an understanding of the part that we have to play to extend your Kingdom here on earth.

This we pray through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord, Amen.

Rona

Please remember in your prayers this week all of the people below in hospital, care homes or in their own homes:-

Mr Donald Grant	Mrs Aileen Morrison (in Biggart Hospital)
Mrs Maude Smillie	Mr Arthur Wilson
Mrs Gina McKnight	Mrs Irene Montgomerie (now home)
Mrs Nancy McKillops	Mrs Heather McLeod
Mrs May Wilkinson	Mrs Fay Cooper
Mrs Betty McPherson	Mrs Anna Irving

Please let the Session Clerk know of any member/relative who goes in to hospital or is ill at home. For those in hospital please ensure you have their given Christian name which may not necessarily be the name by which s/he is usually known.

Thank you Following the illness and death of my daughter Shirley, I wish to thank many friends at NWC for their ongoing support and prayers together with the phone calls, cards and flowers I have received in recent weeks. This has meant so much to me during a very difficult and sad time.

Maude Smillie

Prayer Chain Anyone having a request for prayer may contact Sheena Hunter on 01292 440804 or e-mail her at sheenahunter@hotmail.com

NB. Public worship Due to the current Scottish Government restrictions caused by the Covid pandemic, please note that there will be **no worship in the hall** until further notice. You will receive notification via e-mail or telephone of when we will restart.

Online Donations Do you shop online? If you do please remember that you can raise donations for the church at no extra cost to yourself. All you have to do is go to:-

<https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/> and register Newton Wallacetown Church of Scotland as your charity, then shop at the many different retailers who donate through the site. Remember though, that you have to go to the retailer through easyfundraising.

You can also raise donations when you shop at Amazon. Instead of shopping at the usual site, go to <https://smile.amazon.co.uk/> and register Ayr: Newton Wallacetown Church of Scotland as your charity and the business will make a donation to the church on qualifying purchases.

Salvation Army Food Bank Please note that donations can once again be brought to the halls' vestibule in the church drive between **2.00pm** and **3.00pm each Sunday afternoon** even when the church is closed due to Scottish Government restrictions. Sincere thanks go to all who bring donations and to those who collect and deliver these each week. While staff at the food bank are extremely grateful for all gifts, at present they have an abundance of soup, beans, pasta, rice and tuna.

Items in shorter supply at the moment include tinned potatoes, other tinned vegetables, tinned stew, mince etc., "goodies" eg. biscuits, coffee, toiletries eg. shampoo and soap, household cleaning products.

Can you help? As many of you will be aware, over the years from donations at Tea and Chat we have supported many children through Compassion UK's Child Sponsorship Ministry. Obviously, Covid restrictions have meant that, since March 2020, there has been no Tea and Chat. If you would like to donate a sum – small or large – to help NWC maintain its contributions to give children in second and third world countries the chance to overcome extreme poverty and to have vital stability and security, please contact me by e-mail at lindseycoverdale@outlook.com All donations will be much appreciated. Thank you.

Lindsey Coverdale

Remember **Streaming of our morning service** conducted this week by Christine Tierney and next week by Rev. Rona Young will commence at **11.00am** then our prayer time starts at **12.30pm** with the Lord's Prayer followed by our personal prayers. This helps to bring us together to reach out to him in prayer while we are distancing physically.

Birthdays Happy Birthday wishes go this week to each of the following ladies:-

18th February **Maureen Gemmell**

19th February **Maie Dickie**

20th February **Maude Smillie (80!)**



Speak, O Lord, as we come to You
To receive the food of Your Holy Word,
Take Your truth, plant it deep in us
Shape and fashion us in Your likeness
That the light of Christ might be seen today
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith,
Speak, O Lord, and fulfill in us
All Your purposes for Your glory.

Teach us Lord, full obedience,
Holy reverence, true humility,
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
In the radiance of Your purity;
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
Your majestic love and authority,
Words of pow'r that can never fail
Let their truth prevail over unbelief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds,
Help us grasp the heights of Your plans for us,
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
That will echo down through eternity;
And by grace we'll stand on Your promises
And by faith we'll walk as You walk with us,
Speak, O Lord, till Your church is built
And the earth is filled with Your glory.

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