

Sermon for Proper 24 C  
Church of the Good Shepherd, Wareham  
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Welcome to Advent! The church has now entered Advent, as the new rector Dan Bernier has been called. The search committee and vestry are excited about Dan, a former Roman Catholic priest from Portsmouth, NH who will bring his experience and energy to this church. So now a time of waiting begins until he arrives December first.

The amazing rescue of Chilean mine workers was the big drama in the news this week. In the beginning of August, thirty-three men were trapped almost a half-mile deep in a mine. They had access to water and air, and a small amount of food. Day after day went by as they were trapped. They grew skinny. How do you imagine that they felt? What did they do?

The official version is that they were organized and democratic, united in their desire to survive and support one another. The unofficial versions sound closer to the truth—there were divisions and fights; some gave up and stayed in bed, all thought about dying of starvation. For seventeen days they were alone, cut off from the world. They knew that people were looking for them, but did not know whether or not they would be found—alive, or just as bodies.

On the seventeenth day, a drill broke through to a tunnel near their living quarters. They were able to write a message and tie in onto the drill, telling those above--“We’re all OK in the refuge—the 33.” Now contact had been made. Food and communication could be sent to the 33. They knew that they would survive; that the people looking for them would persevere until all were out. This does not mean that the ordeal was easy, but it was changed.

Jesus told this parable: There was a judge who had absolutely no interest in being fair or serving the people of the town. He only cared about himself—about having money and power. Everybody knew this, but they were stuck with this guy, the only judge available. Most people didn’t even bother going to him, unless they had enough money to bribe him or enough influence to threaten him. One poor widow had been wronged, and she wanted to see justice done. She had no influence or money at all; she surely realized that she was not likely to get fair treatment from the judge. But she was convinced that she deserved justice. She also recognized that the judge was the one person who had the power to give her what she wanted. So she went to him every day, asking for him to rule justly for her. At first, he just laughed at her; she had no money or power, of course he wouldn’t do anything. Next he refused to see her. After a month, he told he would do it, just to shut her up, but he didn’t do anything. She kept coming back. Finally, he could bear it no longer, and he did what she asked, just to get her to stop bothering him.

Jesus tells this story to his disciples as a model for how they should be persistent in prayer. With a huge dose of humor, Jesus compares his father, God, to a corrupt judge. Even the corrupt judge gave in after a while, just because the woman was so persistent and bothersome.

God, of course, actually cares about his people, and wants to do what is right for them. But in case you're not sure of God's goodwill, even if you think God is nothing more than an arbitrary judge, you can assume that God will eventually give you what you want. And then Jesus turns the question back to the disciples—but will the Son of Man find anyone on earth with true faith?

How do we pray? How do we approach God with our prayers? Are we like the widow? She was trapped in her situation, with no way out but through the judge. She was convinced that she deserved an answer **and** she was convinced that the judge had the power to give her what she wanted. And she was convinced that he would eventually, **willingly**, rule for her. Therefore, she was ceaseless in her petitions, day after day after day. Everyone else would have thought her mad to even try, but she did not give up.

Or are we like the miners in the first 17 days? Trapped in a terrible situation, knowing well what they wanted—to be freed from their black prison—perhaps even believing that others were looking for them, wanting to get them out, but unsure if anyone had the power to reach them before they would die. This situation leads to anger, fighting, despair, thoughts of death. The tide turned, of course, on that fateful day when the engineers broke through to the shaft near them. Now they all knew that not only did people want to get them out, they had the ability to do so. They could wait more patiently, assured of their eventual answer to their heart's desire. They would live and be reunited with their families.

How do we pray? Do we pray as if God has the power but not the will to give us what we need, as in the corrupt judge? Do we say, oh well, God isn't really for me, because I'm not good enough to warrant his attention? Or do we pray as if God has the will but not the power, as in the situation with the miners in those first 2 ½ weeks? Do we despair because what we ask for or need seems too impossible, too out of bounds?

We are shown through the teaching, healing, and resurrection of Jesus, that God has both the will and the power to give us our hearts' desires. Not every little whim that crosses our mind, but the deepest longing of our souls. If we approach God as one who wants to and can satisfy our deep hungers, then we will have the faith, the persistence, to keep asking, day after day. And we will have hope, not despair, when the answer is long in coming. Even after they were contacted and knew that eventually they would be rescued, they had to wait seven-and-a-half more weeks until they were pulled out. But they were rescued.

Now that we are in Advent and waiting, what is your prayer for the church and for the new rector? What do you hope that God will do here in preparation? Can we pray this as ones who believe that God has the power and the desire to answer our prayers?

What is the deep longing in your own life? What do you or would you pray for every day? For physical healing? For a change in a family situation? For a job? For the end to an addiction? For the healing of your heart? For family or friends who are struggling? For peace? For justice? For joy?

God our Father/Mother wants only the best for us, and truly is more than ready to hear and act on our prayers. Do we believe that? Are we able to pray daily, hourly for our heart's desires, knowing that God will act for us in the way that is best in the time that is best?

Do not lose heart; your rescuer comes and will release you from any place you are trapped. Let us pray.

Amen.