

SERMON: Sunday – 16 October 2022 – Rev Alistair Cowper

Equipped for every good work

2 Timothy 3:14 - 4:5

Luke 18:1-8

(SLIDE)

My favourite two images from this week.

Jesus said, always pray and don't give up. Is that what we will take away from today's teaching.

It might be. But it might be something else. It might be the insistence that God's every good work IS breaking through in the midst of everything else and transforming everything. And we get to be part of it.

At least I hope that point will prevail since every time we gather we proclaim the new creation emerging from within the old.

But how might we persist in prayer and also be equipped for this every good work that is emerging even now as I speak?

Paul is right to tell Timothy that

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

God teaches us, through the Word, so that, we might be equipped for every good work.

The world needs people equipped for every good work. People to pray, to serve, to preach, to teach, to praise, to cry out for justice, to tell the truth, to nurture and care and love and sing and dance and infuse places with grace.

It helped Timothy greatly, that he had been taught the Scriptures from a very young age. Parents, grandparents, must never underestimate the impact that a Word of God might have in a child's life. And if it's too difficult, or seems impossible, or feels like it's too late, then hear this, it's never too late to pray that someone else might take the Word or share the truth or be there in a way that we might not be able to be.

Never give up praying. Love never gives up.

Jesus told his disciples parables to show them that they should always pray and not give up. And this one does that in particular, this parable of the widow and the judge, who, in the end, grants her request because he's in danger of being worn out by her persistence..

The parable doesn't teach that God is like an irksome judge, who becomes wearied by the widow's persistence.

Rather, God delights every time his children come near. Ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door WILL be opened to you.

People say that Jesus didn't tell the parable to teach about what God was like one can't help make connections when he describes the judge and then says but how much more will God grant her request. In other words God is not like this judge. God is so much more.

As Jesus said, God will see that those treated badly WILL get justice, and quickly.

However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?'

Now there's a question. If the main point of the parable is to teach that the followers of Jesus must always pray and never give up, then what will be the proof that they (or we) have done this?

Here's a reflection I came across which addresses that question of Jesus:

Where will faith be found?
Not in the rights denying,
scarcity mongering
policies of our governments...

Where will faith be found?
Not in the strategy driven rule keeping
efforts of our institutions...

Where will faith be found?
Not in the desperate programme-centric flailing of our churches...

Where will faith be found?
In the acts of everyday people who see and respond
to an opportunity
to make a difference
in their neighbourhood;
those who create beauty

by eschewing what is deemed right and proper
choosing, instead,
to take risks,
to make music,
to dance,
to respond to the rhythm
that is all around...

Attuned to the rhythm of God our senses are awakened
to the gifts
and the needs
of our neighbour.
And there, will faith be found.

That reflection implies that discipleship moves from always praying and never giving up to everyday acts which each of us has opportunity for. The “every good work” that today’s Bible reading speaks of. Acts which in themselves are maybe tiny, and insignificant but which might actually be the very tools for mission that the church needs.

The national church speaks a lot about mission at the moment and often its the big events and programmes that are assumed to be most effective. I probably used to think that but I’ve seen too many programmes come and go that I think it is the everyday prayers and acts that ultimately make a difference. The chance conversations and the God incidences.

I had at least one such encounter this week in which I met, for the first time, someone who for years has carried around a major inner hurt and who appreciated the opportunity to talk about it. I didn’t do anything special. I was just there at the time they chose to speak out. Had it been the day before of the day after it might not have happened. Or had someone else been there that day it may have been someone else who was there to listen and and pray with them.

Paul tells Timothy,

I give you this charge: preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season.

Be prepared in season and out of season. Whether its winter or summer of whether its planned or unplanned, be prepared.

A good gardener uses the Winter to prepare for the Spring. In so many areas of life there can be things we put in place so that we will be ready for when the time comes. Prayer is possibly the biggest thing we can do to prepare us. Prayer that is born out of our knowledge of God and God-breathed

Scripture. Prayer that we do alone, often silently but also together, as we seek God's kingdom together and rejoice in its breaking out in all things and in all people.

May we pray,
Lord Jesus Christ, grant us your fortitude in prayer. May we persist, like the widow persisted. May we ever seek God's goodness and justice, as we grow and practise our faith together. Until God's kingdom comes into all in KNEC and beyond. Amen.