

Address by Ash Leighton Plom, 16 October 2022 at St David's Church & St Michael's Church

Assist us, Lord, to persevere in prayer, faith, and mission, in season and out of season. Amen.

Good morning once again, and in case you'd forgotten, my name's Ash. Our scripture readings today emphasise perseverance. In the Gospel reading Jesus tells that parable to inspire perseverance in prayer and in hope for justice, and the reading from 2 Timothy has Paul call for perseverance in faith and in evangelism. Perseverance in prayer, and perseverance in justice, perseverance in faith and perseverance in evangelism.

Paul was writing to Timothy towards the end of Paul's life, and directs Timothy to continue in what he had learned from holy scripture. We might note, then, that we need to read the scriptures, to continue in what we learn from them. Paul's encouragement in this is grounded partly in certainty (c.f. Luke 1:4), knowing, for example, the reliability of Timothy's teachers, trustworthy people who had themselves experienced the truths they taught and could give evidence for.

So, then, he insists, all scripture is God-breathed, useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. We all need to be taught, and indeed rebuked, corrected, and trained in righteousness from time to time! Paul says that by this teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training from scripture we can be equipped for good works. Whatever work you have to do, whatever paid or voluntary, in employment, at home, in church, with family or friends, whatever is required from you to be a blessing to others, scripture can equip us for it. God doesn't call the equipped, he equips the called.

Perhaps the call many of us feel least equipped to persevere in is to preach the word. But Paul stresses this: it is our call as Christians, to preach not our own ideas, but God's. And naturally, we can't preach what we don't know, so again perhaps it's timely to read some bible this week and in the days ahead.

There's some debate as to what Paul meant by "In season and out of season", but the consensus is it means "at all times", i.e. persevere. Persevere in sharing with people from scripture when special opportunities arise, yes, but also when there is less an obvious opportunity. You don't know how or when God will plant a seed or water it. My friend Justin met a student outside Central Station recently and had the pleasure of sharing the gospel with them. The student had already heard something of

Christianity in assemblies at school, and asked to become a Christian right there on Queen Street when Justin invited him to pray. Someone else had planted a seed of faith in this young man's heart in assemblies at school, and Justin was given the opportunity to nurture it. Now, Justin would be the first to admit, evangelism terrifies him, but remember: God doesn't call the equipped - he equips the called.

Perhaps the greatest piece of equipment for responding to God's call, is prayer. In the parable this morning, Jesus begins by stating his intent: to teach that we ought to persevere in prayer (Luke 18:1). But more particularly, the contents of the parable suggest we should persevere in prayer for justice, and I love that it shows these two things about the heart of God - he wants us to pursue justice, and he wants us to ask him to help us with this.

I also love the plausibility of this parable, that the cause of justice can succeed despite the existence of unjust judges, purely by dint of our perseverance: in the parable, a poor widow was forced to make her appeal to an unjust judge, having been wronged by someone who thought they could exploit her and take what was hers. For some time, the judge refuses, but finally just to stop her bothering him, he gives her what she is entitled to.

And remember, Jesus specifically links this to prayer, to encourage us to pray with perseverance. He assures us that God will give justice when we persevere in prayer. Now, this statement includes a subtle acknowledgment: firstly, that God's people experience trouble and suffering in this world, and that we sometimes meet discouragements in prayer. But the parable assures, justice will come. Scripture promises that God always answers prayer, even if his answer is sometimes "yes", sometimes "no", and sometimes "wait".

Jesus said if an unjust judge will give justice to the widow in the parable, God will give justice "for his chosen ones". This points to some differences between the widow's situation on the one hand, and our's on the other. This widow was nothing to the judge; but God's people are his own, whom he loves. He loves you. Also, whereas she was alone, we have each other, to pray together, and for one another. She had may have anticipated the corrupt judge's initial antipathy for her; but we come to a Father who invites us to pray. Her persistence bothered the judge; but Proverbs 15:8 says our prayers are God's delight!

As you'll have seen in the weekly notices, there's an opportunity for prayer after church this week, to sit in the Lady Chapel with a couple of fellow churchmates to pray for whatever you need or are going through, or for friends or loved ones who

need our prayer. So today especially, why not make use of that space after church - you could even get a coffee and take it with you there so you don't miss out on the hot drink!

Let me finish this sermon with Jesus' final words in the parable. He says, "However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" Faith is the thing that Jesus is looking for. And Paul tells us, scripture is the place to go to "become convinced" in the faith, and to be equipped to persevere in faith and ministry. Whatever your faith is like right now, perhaps it's strong and robust, perhaps it's feeling a bit sketchy or unsure: you can strengthen it through reading holy scripture, and through prayer, asking God to help you persevere in prayer, in hope for justice, and in sharing his love and joy with those around you. Amen.