

Running toward God—22nd Sunday after Pentecost Year C
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Jesus teaches us to pray always and not lose heart.

I was walking home on a chilly night this past week, and I stopped at a traffic light near Riverside High School. Being a rule follower, I was waiting patiently for the light to change so I could cross Locust. While I waited, a High School student came up next to me. I noticed she was incredibly short and was carrying an enormous duffle bag. She had the look of a gymnast after practice. While we were waiting our turn to cross, a westbound bus passed in front of us. It was clear from the young woman's moan that she wanted to be on that bus. The stop was about a block away, on the other side of the street, and we were still waiting for the signal to cross. In an impressive burst of speed and chutzpah, my young friend hoisted her duffle on her shoulder and hauled off after the bus. Impressed by her moxie, I just smiled really big as I watched her book across the street and up the sidewalk to catch the bus at its next stop. I kept grinning all the way home, so impressed with the power of this young woman.

What was she running after? In the dark cool night, the lights of the bus seemed warm and inviting. Was she going toward home? Toward family? Was this young athlete hungry for dinner after a long day of school and then a longer afternoon of athletics? I have no idea. But what I did see in her stance was a decision: I am going to get on that bus no matter what.

As I stood there watching this young woman, I starting to wonder what it would be like if we showed that same kind of tenacity seeking God. What would it look like to put that kind of strength, that kind of resolve into our quest for Christ. I grew up in a church-y household, and perhaps you did too. Maybe church and God have just been facts of life. I know that God comes to me in the prayers, in the breaking of the bread. We're good Episcopalians, and we don't tend to think about racing after the Divine. We're not much of a racing people. Maybe it can be different. Maybe, faith can be electric. I want to be like that young woman racing toward the bus. I want to be like that with my God.

Today's parable highlights another determined woman. This time, it is a widow who is not receiving justice from the judge in town. She comes back, determined, to receive from the judge what is due her. And she succeeds. Her tenacity compels the judge in town to attend to her properly. Jesus lifts her up as an example of tenacity in prayer and the rewards that follow. Prayer, of course, can be the passive reception of what God is offering in our lives. But what if it can have another component—one that is active, seeking, determined.

Jesus teaches us to seek God always and not lose heart. I appreciate that it can be easier to hear these words than to put them into practice. What about those times when it feels like God is far away? What about those prayers that seem unanswered.

Jesus' point about prayer is not, I believe, that we have access to some kind of pipeline from our desires to God's basket of magical gifts. In prayer, I believe we find instead the gifts we need to navigate this world. Temperance. Fidelity. Grace. Empathy. It is when we are close to God, it is when we are tenacious in prayer, that we find ourselves in the best posture to attend to God. To hear God. To know God.

Perhaps today's lesson is this: Do not be afraid to run after God. Do not be afraid to grab your enormous duffle and chase after God with all your might. Be like the widow in the story. Be like the athlete chasing that bus. Not because God needs you to run after God. But because sometimes the very act of running is good for the soul. So pray always. Seek always. And in the words of Jesus, "do not lose heart." Amen.