

Persistence Required

Luke 18:1-8

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

October 19, 2025

Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

Maybe the four-year-olds have it right.

You know the children I am talking about. The ones who can stay focused on what they want until they get it. The ones we are glad not to be parenting when we see them in the stores. The ones we have parented and, if you are like me, have sometimes given in to when we just couldn't hear them say it one more time: "But I really want that toy. Can't I please have that toy? Why can't I have that toy? But I need that toy." Yes, four-year-olds know that persistence pays off.

But too often as adults we forget that. Too often we learn to just go along with things. We learn to just do what is expected. We learn to get by and not draw extra attention to ourselves. We learn to survive, and sometimes we even learn how we can thrive, in less than ideal circumstances which generally means forgetting the people for whom such approaches don't work.

Perhaps we need a dose of four-year-old persistence.

The widow in our story certainly knew that. She knew that the road to justice was paved with persistence. She knew that even though she took a risk in continuing to bother the judge, that the risk was worth it...not even just worth it, but that it was essential to her very being. She knew that if she didn't stand up for the justice that was due, no one would.

I think the world needs a few more persistent widows.

Friends, we worship with some lovely children. Many of us have other delightful children in our lives. We find children easy to celebrate. We especially find them easy to celebrate when they are doing well.

And meanwhile, there are bleak realities for too many children and youth. Here in our developed, first world country still there are statistics like these (statistics from [2023 State of America's Children® Report - Children's Defense Fund](#)):

- Among the 74 million children living in the United States, 11 million live in poverty.
- One in six children under the age of five (that's 3 million children) are poor. This is the highest rate of poverty for any age group.
- And if you wonder why they are poor, then consider this: 1 million workers earned the minimum wage in 2020. 67% of workers earning the minimum wage were women. And even two years later, in 2022, a minimum wage, full-time worker could not afford a two-bedroom apartment anywhere in America.

Additionally, child care costs single parents at least one-third of their annual income in all but seven states. It's no wonder children are living in poverty.

And how about this?

- The U.S. spends 2.7 times as much (per person) on incarceration as it does on education.
- Of the 265,600 children arrested in the United States in 2021, 1 in 3 were Black children. That's 33% even though Black children constitute only 15% of the nation's youth population. And let's just agree, it's not the children, but the system that has a problem.

Then there's this:

- Three out of four students who experience homelessness are children of color. While Hispanic students account for 28% of all students enrolled in public schools, they represented 39% of students who experience homelessness. And now they, especially our Hispanic children, are experiencing trauma and fear in the face of deportations and violence. Similarly, Black students account for 15% of students overall, but 24% of students who experience homelessness.
- Gun violence remains the number one cause of death for children ages 1-19 and lawmakers continue to be reticent to address gun control.
- Meanwhile, lawmakers have made decisions which result in major cuts to Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) funding, something that will directly harm the health outcomes of American's children. A new study by Harvard PhD candidate Ye Shen "estimated that more than 60 percent of American children relied on Medicaid or CHIP at some point before they turned 18" ([Most American children rely on Medicaid, CHIP—They could soon be at risk](#)). And Edwin Park, a professor at the Center for Children and Families at Georgetown University, confirmed the fear that cutting these budgets would impact children recognizing "that 45 percent of children with special health care needs rely on Medicaid, 'where Medicaid is either primary or is filling in gaps for services, like long-term services and supports, that their primary coverage does not cover'" [Most American children rely on Medicaid, CHIP—They could soon be at risk](#).

If the burden of these truths feels heavy, remember, this is just a small part of the reality that so many children in our community and nation are facing.

Friends, our children need voices that will cry out against the injustices they are facing and that will do so with persistence until something changes.

Now, you might say, "But remember, Pastor, this was a parable about prayer." And I would say that you are right. Our reading began saying, "Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart" (Luke 18:1, NRSVUE).

So, what is prayer? While we may sometimes act like it, prayer is not intended to be our instruction-giving to God. Prayer is not a way to let ourselves off the hook by proclaiming that we have done our part and now God will take care of it.

Rather prayer is a covenant that we make with God. It is a commitment that we enter into with the holy, a commitment where we lift up the concerns of our heart trusting that God hears them *and* where we offer ourselves to continue the work for which we are praying.

In a quote credited to Pope Francis we hear, "You pray for the hungry. Then you feed them. That's how prayer works."

Today we have prayed for the children. We have prayed with gratitude for the children in our midst and so we don't only say thank you but in those prayers we make a commitment to continue to create this as a place where children are not only welcomed, but where they are listened to, where they are safe, where they can thrive and know love and know joy.

Today we have prayed for the children. We have prayed with hope for children who are hungry and hurting, children against whom systems are shaped, children who are too often forgotten by those in power. And so we don't only offer up instructions for God, but we commit ourselves to continue to work on behalf of these children, to speak out when it is difficult, to show up when we are tired, to be persistent until our persistence finally pays off, until they are the beneficiaries of a beloved community where they are valued and loved and where they are well.

I want to close today with a prayer from Children's Defense Fund titled, "Prayer to Stand Up to Justice." It says this, "Righteous God, open my eyes. Help me to see what you cannot ignore. Help me to understand what my choices mean for children who are depending on adults to do what is life-giving. Righteous God, open my lips. Help me to speak so that others, too, may see. Help me to understand how connected my life is to the lives of thousands of children who endure experiences that kids should never have to. Righteous God, open my heart. Help me to live differently so that what I know is made visible. Help me to act in faith, believing that your Spirit may move in ways I cannot yet understand, but will bring your kingdom of righteousness to life on earth. Amen." ("Prayer to Stand Up to Justice" from Faith Expressions - Children's Defense Fund, found at: <https://www.childrensdefense.org/our-work/building-a-movement-for-youth/childrens-sabbaths-celebration/faith-expressions/>)

May that be our prayer - a prayer of understanding, of vision, of action, and of persistence...a prayer that we pray with our whole lives. Amen.