

I will be the first to admit that my nephew's have me entirely figured out. They know that I am the weak link when it comes to decision making and making them happy. I cannot handle when they don't get something that they want, and I guess that makes me a good aunt, right? Because I'm the one that will just say yes, regardless of circumstances or situation.

Sebastian is a big one for wanting you to *watch* him do stuff, and not like, hey come watch me play baseball; it's come, sit here on the couch next to me, and watch me play this inane game on my iPad. I cannot tell this kid no, and he knows it. Hey, Tina you want to watch me play my game? Yes, of course. And I can't even pull off the, yes, I will snuggle next to you and then still steal glances at my phone or pay attention to something else while you play this game of randomly jumping over fireballs. Nope, I am locked in. When he was little, we used to have this thing where I would fly him around the house. I would flip him over my shoulder and we would run around the living room ad nauseum, and I would do it over and over and over again, only saying no for breaks. This child is going to be nine and is now *significantly* too big to be flown, and yet the last time he asked me to at least try, I did. It didn't work, but I tried.

And then there is Felix. If Felix gets an idea in his head, it will not get out until it is acknowledged, and he knows that I am the prime target for

getting that to happen. When Felix wants something to happen, he wants it to happen, and Jon and Kristin know this, and being good parents they know when to just say no. Me being a good and maddening aunt, no is not in my vocabulary for this kid. He's fourteen and still my baby. When we were at OBX this summer and he wanted to go to the beach one last time, even as it got later and later in the day, he knew I was going to be the one to say we would try and make it happen. When I'm visiting and he wants to swing some quiet time with just the adults, without little brother around, he knows I am the one to ask if we can watch a movie. No matter what, no matter how many times he asks, he will either get a yes or at we will have to see but hopefully out of me, because I can't tell him no. These two have learned very well, you want the thing that no one else wants to give you, ask Aunt Tina, and then see what happens. It doesn't always work, but a solid seven out of ten times, it absolutely does. But you might be wondering, doesn't all the asking over and over and over again get annoying? Oh it absolutely does, but this is the role I have put myself in, so here we are.

So I guess, Jesus could have told the parable today like this, when you pray, pray like a nephew who will not stop asking until his aunt says yes. Honestly? I think that might sit better with me than this parable usually does, because most of the time it kind of annoys me, which apparently *is* the

theme of the parable—rather than the parable of the unjust judge, it could have been the parable of the annoying woman, or how to annoy God with prayer—but I’ve come to look at it a bit differently this year, but let’s not get too far ahead. What is going on here?

Jesus is continuing on his journey to Jerusalem and it seems that he is passing the time by telling either the crowds or just the disciples stories and lessons along the way. We aren’t 100% certain of Jesus’ audience here, because Luke is hitting the point of his gospel where it feels like he is throwing all the rest of the stuff in that he wants to say before the narrative arrives in Jerusalem so it’s a bit mushy in terms of details. Regardless, Jesus is in full on teaching mode and for once we get the point of the parable before the parable itself. Jesus wants to teach whomever it is that is listening about the need to pray always and not give up, not grow despondent, and he figures the best way to do that is with a parable about being incessant.

We have a random judge in a random city, but what we know about that judge is that he isn’t a great guy. He has no respect for God and no respect for the people he is called to serve. During his tenure, a widow comes to him with a grievance against an opponent. We know precisely zero other details, just that she wants justice, and the judge being the stellar dude that he is, ignores her, and continues to ignore her, refusing her

requests at every turn. Eventually, the widow's pleading grows so incessant, so annoying, so bothersome that the judge decides to give in. He even says that this has nothing to do with God, with the woman's case, with justice, he just wants her to quit bothering him and so he's going to grant her justice.

This, Jesus says, is a model for prayer, because if even this ungodly, disrespectful man will eventually listen to this widow's pleas, then how much more will God listen to us? How much more will God respond diligently, faithfully, and in due time? Jesus says that God is not one to delay justice and so when we pray without ceasing, even when we pray with the annoying persistence of a toddler, God will listen, because that's who God is. God is so much more than this unjust judge, and even that guy eventually got around to dispensing justice, so we can trust that God absolutely will too.

But that's the rub isn't it? We hear this parable, we hear these promises of God responding to prayer, we hear Jesus say that God will not delay long in helping God's people, that God will quickly grant justice to God's people, and then we look around at the world and we're like, umm, who hasn't been praying incessantly enough because we don't see any justice coming quickly around here? How many of us can run back through out prayers, prayers that we have said over and over and over again and still

feel as though they haven't been answered? That we are in the midst of being delayed long in being helped? How many of us look at our prayers and feel like they're just sitting in line at the DMV waiting for their number to be called, feeling like it's never going to happen? It makes our hearts cry out at this parable, well then, what about my prayer? What about me? Have I not been annoying enough? Do we need to change our prayers to, "Dear God, help me be so annoying that this gets answered? I'm sure there is some interpretation of this that goes like that, but I think it actually requires a little bit of introspection to dig a little deeper.

Today, I would dare to ask if, in this parable scenario, *we* aren't the unjust judge? You may be thinking that makes zero sense, but bear with me. How many of us can think of a time when our prayers were answered through the work, the care, the love, the service of another person? More often than not, right? Prayers for healing get answered by the diligent hands of doctors and nurses stewarding the gifts God has given them. Prayers for strength and courage get answered by a community surrounding you with support and love. Prayers for understanding come through conversation with someone you trust who will be open and honest with you. All of those are answers from God that come through the loving hands of our siblings in Christ, which brings us to this parable...how many prayers, incessant,

steadfast, crying out for justice prayers do we ignore day in and day out, more often than not labeling them as annoying, rather than as honest pleadings of a heart in need of justice?

I get it, the news cycle, the Facebook posts, the constant barrage of information that we receive can get annoying and heart-wearying, but what if for once we didn't hear or see all of that as just information, but as prayers? And I know, you're thinking well there are some prayers that are too big for *me* to answer, and sure, none of us are going to be out here solving world peace, but all of us can do *something*.

Being willing to educate yourself about what's actually going on in Palestine, why we as the ELCA stand with the Palestinian people, being able to articulate the pain and devastation in ways that aren't politically triggering. That is an answer to prayer. That is saying, I hear you and I'm willing to engage in hard conversation for the sake of my neighbor. When you're on a Zoom call or walk up to a new barista at your favorite coffee place and you see names labeled with pronouns, don't ignore them, don't roll your eyes and wonder why this has to be a thing. Answer someone's prayer. Read them, see them, *use them*. That is answering someone's prayer begging to have their selfhood honored. Do not take every headline as straight up truth and then just move along or share the post without actually

investigating. Recognize the harm that click bait can cause, the misinformation it can generate. That is an answer to prayer, because it is stopping a cycle of harm caused by miles of information that only go an inch deep. When whatever the thing happens that makes you want to roll your eyes and go, ugh, *this* again, resist the eye roll and instead dare to ask yourself *why* this thing irks you, what prayer is being prayed over and over again and how can you maybe hear it differently?

So often, we are the unjust judge though we are loathe to admit it. We sigh and groan and say we don't want to hear anymore about LGBTQIA+ rights or gender discrimination or immigration or the housing crisis that is happening right in our own city. We scroll as fast as can past articles about the impacts of government shutdown and kids in Gaza and climate change. But what if...what if those things that we ignore are prayers? Prayers of our siblings that God is placing in front of us so that we might be instruments of God's justice and mercy? What if we are the ones preventing our siblings from having their prayers answered because we're unwilling to listen, to respond, to act, to learn? We're not going to solve everything, but we can all certainly answer something. Be your neighbor's always say yes aunt. Be the one willing to help them fly even if it seems impossible. Dare to be the answer to your neighbor's prayer. **AMEN!!!**