

Texts: Luke 18:1-9

Date: 13 October 2022

Place: Fellowship@10

Introduction

The parable in Luke 18:1-8, often known as the “Parable of the Unjust Judge”, is a familiar parable to many of us. The parable is about a “Persistent Woman.”

Now there are only two characters in the parable itself:

- **The unjust judge**
- **and the persistent widow.**

Which character do you identify with? Are you the judge or the widow? I might be wrong but I think most of us would identify with the widow. I want to suggest that you see yourself as the judge and not the widow this morning.

NOW, the judge who will later be made more-or-less like to God is not a nice character at all. He is a kind of anti-hero. This judge is a self-centred narcissist. He gives little or no thought to God in the course of his work and really does not much care for other people, either. It looks as though this is one judge who is very much in it for himself. He is proud and arrogant and does not typically see much farther than the tip of his own nose.

As we listen to the parable I’d like you to imagine this persistent woman is the personification of God and the unjust judge, well that’s you and I, we are the unjust judge. The only other character of the parable is a widow with a complaint, an allegation, a legal case for the courts.

By the way there are numerous injunctions in the Bible to care for widows and orphans and to avoid taking advantage of their situation of having no husband or father to protect them. The warning not to oppress a widow or an orphan is stated with full rigor:

In Exodus 22:21-23 we read: ‘You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan. If you do mistreat them, I will heed their cry as soon as they cry out to Me, and My anger shall blaze forth and

I will put you to the sword, and your own wives shall become widows and your children orphans.'

Similarly, the prophet Jeremiah declares: *'If you really mend your ways and your actions; if you execute justice between one man and another; if you do not oppress the stranger, the orphan, and the widow (Jeremiah 7:5-6).'*

In the judicial codes given to Israel, God made it clear that the neediest and most vulnerable people were to be cared for way ahead of everyone else. So, although not the most urgent of all possible plaintiffs, a widow did rank in the Top 2 categories of persons most deserving of very diligent judicial care.

We have no clue precisely what her case was about, but it doesn't really matter – this unjust judge wanted nothing to do with her in any event. He wouldn't even take the case. Lacking any other recourse, the widow pursued the only avenue open to her: becoming a public nuisance!

Some commentators speculate that after a while, the woman did not content herself with standing in line in front of the judge's formal bench at the courthouse. It's possible she started essentially to stalk the man, approaching him in the marketplace when he was trying to buy a bag of onions, waiting for him outside his sports club and nailing him the minute he stepped out of the building, following him into restaurants and loudly inquiring after her case while the man waited to get seated. In short, she was a nuisance an irritant to the judge. I wonder how many times did he tell her to go away. She was desperate.

Can you imagine the desperation of those who decided to get on a leaky boat to seek asylum? They were so desperate they took high risks, but they felt they had no alternative. They knew the journey by boat was a last resort, and that they could lose their lives. The trauma of this journey has troubled many asylum seekers for years.

In verse 5 we have the unjust judge complaining that the woman is ‘bothering’ him. In the original Greek, however, the word translated here as ‘bother’ literally means to give somebody a black eye. It wasn’t just that she was bugging the living daylights out of him, she was doing it in such a way as to damage his reputation. It was proving to be embarrassing for him. So purely out of a sense of self-preservation, the judge gives in. It’s difficult to imagine a worse motive, but there it is.

As I have said earlier, I have never much cared for the traditional interpretations of Jesus parable of the persistent widow. I have long ago given up the belief that God will respond if only we pray often enough. I know too many people who have fervently and persistently fallen to their knees and begged God for help all to no avail.

I’ve never been able to tell anyone that all they need to do is to be persistent in their prayers and not lose heart. Now some of you might be thinking does that mean I have given up praying? **Read my lips: NOT AT ALL!**

Trusting that everything that is, is in God, and that God lives and breathes in, with and through us, I trust prayer to open us up to all that is beyond us and within us and I see prayer as a way for us to connect to the God and to one another in ever deepening and expanding ways.

I believe that prayer is incredibly powerful and that it can change lives. I also believe that prayer can enable us to change the world.

I just don’t think that we’re supposed to be persistent in prayer in the hope that we can change God’s mind. Do you? However, some of us have the tendency to throw the baby with the bath water. Some even try to replace the baby with another.

NOW let's remember the author of the Gospel of Luke was writing at the end of the first century; some 60 to 80 years after the life of Jesus of Nazareth. During this time, the Romans were persecuting both Jewish and Christian communities.

Not losing heart in the face of such persecution would have been quite challenging for the people to whom this gospel was written.

Some scholars suggest that the gospel writer put his own words into the mouth of Jesus when he wrote: *"Listen to what this corrupt judge is saying.*

Won't God then do Justice to the chosen who call out day and night? Will God delay long over them? I tell you, God will give them swift justice.

But when the Promised One comes will faith be found anywhere on earth?"

Truth be told justice is anything but swift.

Do you know the word *Diko* (justice) occurs six times, in various forms, in this brief passage?

For me the key to this ancient text lies in the Hebrew language.

The word in Hebrew for widow is a word that also means silent, or voiceless one.

When I begin to imagine the silent, voiceless masses whose only method of protest is to cry out with the pain of their existence, I can begin to understand that it is I who am the unjust judge and it is God who is crying out through the pain of my voiceless sisters and brothers, crying out to me for justice.

How many times have we all heard their voiceless pain?

How many times have the circumstances of the lives of those in need of justice cried out to us for legal protection from their opponents? **Can we hear their protestations as prayer?**

Can we begin to understand that God, comes to us through the lives and witnesses of our sisters and brothers as they appeal to us for justice?

Can we begin to understand our role as the unjust judge and God's role as the persistent widow?

Do you remember the hashtag #Me Too movement?

If you use social media, you've probably seen the hashtag #MeToo on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and other sites.

It was started as a way for survivors of sexual harassment, sexual assault, and sexual bullying to bond and share their stories. It has become a global movement that has sparked significant changes, both social and legal.

What's more, the movement has allowed survivors to feel supported while simultaneously initiating a national — and worldwide — conversation about the widespread issues surrounding harassment, assault, and the changes that need to be made.

We all know that justice is anything but swift.

In May 2022 in the wake of George's Floyd's murder by the police, protests erupted across the United States. The first protest took place in Minneapolis, the night after George Floyd was killed. Within days, protests were taking place in all fifty states of America and more than 140 cities nationwide. Tens of thousands of people also gathered in countries around the world to support the protests and show solidarity.

The late Martin Luther King, Jr said: *"No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream."*

We hear the voice of the voiceless begging us for some relief from their opponents. All too often, their pleas go unanswered, as we turn our attentions to other matters, matters we judge to be more worthy of our attentions. But from time to time their sheer persistence captures our attention and succeeds in disturbing us, and we must struggle to distract ourselves from their constant nagging, annoying persistent presence.

Whether it's the millions of persecuted Uyghurs— mostly Muslim, crying out for freedom,

or the millions of poor, hungry and homeless crying out for the crumbs off our tables, or the battered and abused children, longing for relief, or the plaintive groaning of the earth, longing for relief from the burden of our greed and waste as we continue to use up the precious resources at the expense of the health of the planet.

Widows, silent ones, voiceless ones, unable to speak cry out to us for justice, persistently hoping that we will relent if only for the sake of our own peace of mind. Our God, the Compassionate One who lives and breathes in with and through us, also lives and breathes in with and through the widows of this world of ours, the voiceless ones who long for us to relent and give them justice.

We are incredibly powerful judges, and we can change the world.
The Source of All that Is, lives and breathes in with and through us.
The prayers of the voiceless will not go unheeded, if we but listen to their cries for justice.

My prayer:

Let the justice we impart come swiftly. Let it be so. Let it be so.

Benediction

We are incredibly powerful judges, and we can change the world.
The Source of All that Is, lives and breathes in with and through us.
The prayers of the voiceless will not go unheeded if we but listen to their cries for justice.
Let the justice we impart come swiftly. In the name of the One who is Creator, Christ, and Spirit One. **Amen.**