

**Justice, Prayer, & Faith**  
**Luke 18:1-8**  
29<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Harvest Home Sunday  
Rev. Don Best  
Bethel Presbyterian Church  
West Union, IA  
October 20, 2019

In our gospel reading this morning, we hear another parable from Jesus. Luke is the only gospel writer to include this parable. Luke tells us in the beginning that this parable is about the disciples' "need to pray always and not to lose heart." Certainly, this is also a lesson for us as well. Listen now to Luke, chapter 17, verses 11 through 19:

<sup>18:1</sup> Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.

<sup>2</sup> He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people.

<sup>3</sup> In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.'

<sup>4</sup> For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, <sup>5</sup> yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'"

<sup>6</sup> And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says.

<sup>7</sup> And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them?

<sup>8</sup> I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

Sermon

This parable reminds me of an old-fashioned melodrama. You know the ones with a villain everyone hates, and a damsel in distress that we all want to win in the end. The judge is of course the villain, and the widow the damsel. While I retell the story, I would like all of you to participate: booing the judge and cheering the widow. Okay? When I say the judge, you say "BOO," and when I say the widow, you say, "YEA."

Once upon a time, in a certain town, there was a judge (BOO) who was anything but righteous. This judge (BOO) was indeed unjust, because he had

no respect for God, and even less for those who appeared before him. According to the Law of Moses, and the Old Testament, a judge was supposed to act for God in settling disputes among God's people. This judge (BOO) was completely unfit, unqualified, and unwilling to fill his role in the community.

In this town lived a widow (YEA). In Jewish society, a widow had very little. Her husband who died held all of the property in their marriage. When he died everything would have been passed to their sons, if they had any. If not, with no land and no one to care for her, the widow (YEA) would have no means of support, no one to care for her, and no one to defend her from others who meant her harm. This particular widow (YEA) had a problem with someone in the village. We don't know the specifics of their dispute, but the only option for this widow (YEA) was to take her case before the local court. But, the judge (BOO) who was dishonest and corrupt, refused to even hear her case.

With no other option for justice, the widow (YEA) returned to the judge (BOO) every chance she had. She was there in his court every day trying to plead her case. She was even outside his home reminding him that she had a grievance with another in the community. Day after day the widow (YEA) cried out to the judge (BOO): 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' But the judge (BOO) denied her any hearing.

But the widow (YEA) was relentless and persisted to plea her case. Finally, after many days, and many appearances by the widow (YEA) the judge (BOO) said to himself:

"Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming."

Not for the sake of justice, but for his own selfish reason, the judge (BOO) granted the widow (YEA) her day in court and ruled in her favor.

THE END

Justice is at the heart of this parable. The widow cries out for justice. It is what she expects from a judge. At least from a just judge who feared God, and respected the people. But this judge lacked both, and would not give the widow any justice. Yet, as unfit and unjust as this judge was, he was still the widow's only hope for justice, and persistence was her only recourse. Still the judge refused her case, until she persisted in asking him. In the end, the judge gave in, but not out of righteousness, but out of his own interest; to gain a little peace from the widow.

If you look at this parable allegorically, the judge could represent all of the injustices in this world. All of the oppression of our society that keeps the poor, from getting a fair shot at the American dream. Immigration policies that force men, women, and whole families to live a shadowed existence hiding out in the fringes of our communities. All of the prejudices in society that separate other groups. Such as, a justice system that disproportionately incarcerates minorities, especially men. A system that virtually eliminates any chance at a new beginning or hope for true freedom in society.

In this interpretation the widow has to be not just the poor, the immigrant, or the minority, but every one who claims the mantle of Christ; all who are his disciples should be crying out day after day for justice not just for some, but for all of God's children. We are called to stand with the widows of the world and cry out for justice.

But that is not all, in the rest of our reading, Jesus explains his point for teaching this parable:

"Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them."

In the beginning, Luke tells us that this parable is about the need to pray always and not to lose heart. Jesus also encourages us to cry to God day and night. But, be careful. Jesus is not saying that we need to pray day and night, night and day, until we wear down God. God is not like the judge in this story. Our persistence in prayer is not chipping away at some wall between us and God. Jesus clearly says that God will grant justice to his chosen ones, and that God will not "delay long in helping them." Unlike the judge, God will quickly grant justice.

So it is not enough that we cry out against justice in the world, that we address the injustices in the world, but that we cry out to God in prayer. We are charged to pray always, by Luke, and night and day, by Jesus. The widow may have had no other source for justice, but we have the merciful God to call on in prayer.

Finally, at the end of our reading, Jesus asked: "And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

It might seem that this is out of the blue. What does crying out and praying for justice have to do with being faithful?

When Jesus asked the question about finding faith on earth, after telling and interpreting the parable of the unjust judge and persistent widow, he is linking faith, to justice and to prayer. It also makes this the third Sunday in a row when faith was part of the message.

Two weeks ago, we learned that it was not how much faith we have, and not the size of our faith, that mattered but the source of our faith. It was not the amount of faith that we have as Christians, but the one in whom we have faith. The faithful God, and the only Son of God are the source and power behind our faith.

Last week, when one of the ten lepers Jesus healed returned, praising God and thanking Jesus, we learned the proper response, the proper expression of our faith was praise and thanksgiving. As we receive God's grace, we must respond with worship and thanks.

Today, after hearing the story of the judge and the widow, after learning for the need to cry out for justice in the world, and the need to pray to God, the only true source of justice in the world, we can see that prayer is the essential medium that strengthens our faith, undoes injustice, and thwarts evil in the world.

When you see injustice, cry out for justice, but also pray to the just God. Pray to the one we are told will hear and quickly grant justice.

Let us pray:

God of justice, injustice is all around us, in the world and in our communities, give us strength and purpose to cry out for justice. Help us, O God, to seek your justice in constant prayer; to seek you in every time and place; to follow the example of your Son, and our Lord, to pray without ceasing in a broken and fearful world.

AMEN.