

Luke 18:1-8

Jesus tells a parable of an unjust judge who is worn down by a widow's pleas. Jesus is calling God's people to cry out for justice and deliverance. For if an unethical judge will ultimately grant the plea of a persistent widow, how much more will God respond to those who call.

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. ²He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. ³In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' ⁴For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, ⁵yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.' " ⁶And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? ⁸I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

The gospel reading from Sunday, October 16th, 2022.

As I do every week in preparing my message for Sunday, I use a study guide from our wider church, the ELCA, that we use each Wednesday at our weekly Bible study here at the church. It's a free resource and one that is very valuable in helping us unpack the gospel lesson for the coming Sunday. It's called Daily Discipleship,. You can find it online at www.elca.org and type in Daily Discipleship in the search bar.

One of the questions in the study guide this week was "What can we learn from the widow in the parable from Luke's Gospel?" Great question! And so as I read the gospel for this Sunday, I kept asking myself what, in fact, *can* we learn from this parable in Luke? What is it about her relationship with this unjust judge, this tenacious and even contentious relationship that draws my attention? What is it about her and the way she deals with this unjust judge that informs us and our faith?

First, there is the power dynamic between the two – the judge portrayed here as aloof, uncaring, ungodly, unconcerned about the woman's plight in life, and more. And then there is the widow herself. We know where widows and orphans were ranked in the time of Jesus – at or near the very lowest rung of society.

At first glance, it looks like this judge holds all the power in this particular relationship. But, does he really? The text tells us he is an ungodly man – a man who likely cared little for God, or for this woman, but most likely, only for himself. Does anyone know someone like that?

The woman probably didn't have the right to vote, so she can't possibly do anything for the judge to further his career in politics or on the bench, so he dismisses her, relegating her to irrelevant status. He sees her as a complete nuisance. Like a fly or a pesky gnat that you just want to swat away.

So what might we learn from this widow in our gospel today? The first thing I notice is her tenacity. Her persistence. Her doggedness and coming back again and again to this unjust judge, expecting him to hear and honor her request for justice. And she doesn't give up or give in.

The second thing we learned from this widow is that she's not afraid or intimidated by this gap in the power dynamic between herself and the judge. She is not impressed with his position and his authority. She knows that he holds the key to her request, but isn't afraid to push him for action.

But here's the thing that I take away most from this parable in Luke's Gospel. Her request – her demand is specific. She comes to this judge asking for one thing, and one thing only, and that is justice against an opponent of hers. She doesn't ask for peace in the world, or some other abstract or nebulous concept. Instead, she asks for something specific. And that is justice. A resetting of things against an opponent – may be someone who's done her wrong in some way. Or someone who owes her something. We don't know what the specific offense against her is, but she certainly does. Her request is specific. She has one thing in mind when she faces the judge, and that is justice – a resetting of things between her and her opponent whoever or whatever that opponent looks like. A leveling of the playing field, if you will. But she knows.

I think about our sisters and brothers in the faith on the other Florida coast this morning in the aftermath of Hurricane Ian, who are struggling with life and death issues. I am betting that when those folks do have time to pray in those communities, they're not praying for peace, love, and understanding. They're not praying for a justice against their opponent. They are likely praying to God for specific things – clean clothes, bottled water, fresh food, power restored, insurance claims settled quickly, lost pets found, businesses rebuilt, and more.

Our church pews are full of people just like this widow in our gospel today. Exhausted by a world that breaks us down and spits us out. A world angered by a God who doesn't always seem to hear and answer the prayers we lift up, at least as we hope God will answer them.

But here's the thing – if we petition to ungodly people like the unjust judge in the story today, and they respond, how much more will a loving God listen, hear and honor our prayers? How much more will God lean in and hear and answer our prayers? A loving, caring God who hears our deepest longings and needs. A loving God who did not turn a deaf ear to His creation, but who gave his only son, so that we might have eternal life. The Psalmist writes in Psalm 50, “Call on me in your day of trouble, and I will deliver you “, God says.

What can I learn from the widow in our parable today? Pray without ceasing. Petition God for what is on your heart, being specific in your petitions. Be tenacious and bold in your praying, naming that for which you pray. Wrestle with God. It's OK to strive with God. As we heard in our first reading for this Sunday. Don't give up. Expect God to hear and to answer your prayers.

In closing, I find it instructive to read the words that Martin Luther wrote in the Large Catechism in his section on the Lord's Prayer. He writes the following, “God desires nothing more from us than that we ask many and great things of him and on the contrary, he is angered if we do not ask and demand with confidence. Imagine if the richest and most powerful emperor commanded a poor beggar to ask for whatever he might desire, and was prepared to give lavish, royal gifts, and the person asked only for a dish of beggar's broth. He would rightly be considered a rogue and a scoundrel, who had made a mockery of the imperial Majesty's command and was unworthy to come into his presence. Just so, it is a great reproach and dishonor to God if we to whom he offers and pledges so many inexpressible

blessings or lack confidence that we shall receive them and scarcely venture to ask for a morsel of bread.”

Sisters and brothers in the faith, strive first for the kingdom of God, and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.

It is indeed right to give thanks to God always; pray often; pray for what is on your heart; pray without ceasing; pray boldly; be persistent in your prayers like the widow in our gospel this morning. And all these things shall be added onto you. Thanks be to God. Amen