

Sunday October 23, 2022
Lesson 8: Justice for the Persistent
Scripture: Luke 18: 1-8

Context:

This fall we continue our series titled “Freedom.” Our second unit is titled “Justice” and looks at scriptures where God advocates for those who are vulnerable, in need, or those maligned by society. Today’s scripture lesson comes from the gospel of Luke and looks at one of the parables Jesus tells to make a point. Our purpose will be to comprehend God’s view of justice and our call to practice equality.

The parable begins with Jesus on a different subject. He is talking to the disciples about the power of prayer and the call to not be discouraged. To continue his point, Jesus then tells the parable of the judge and the widow.

The scene is a city where an unjust judge who neither fears God or respects people is hounded by a widow who comes to him seeking justice. We are never given the cause of why the widow comes to him, except for the mentioning of an adversary who afflicts her. She comes to the judge, seeking for him to address the inequality and to give her what is owed her.

The judge finally acquiesces and realizes this will not stop. He is not moved by a sense of justice or for thirsting for goodness. Instead, he is moved by the persistence of the widow to listen to her and have her case brought before him. He realizes if he does not listen to her, he will be embarrassed as people will see him as being negligent in his duties as a judge in the city.

This parable has often confused Christian interpreters on who to assign as the characters. Is God saying God is like the unjust judge and we as humans need to continue to badger him in our prayer life? Instead, we might be moved to see this parable as more of a foil like we see with the parable of the steward caught cheating. The movement of the parable is from the lesser to the greater: if a cruel judge will give way to the unrelenting pressure of the widow, how much more will God listen to the prayers of the saints?¹ God is making a point more about persistence than the judge and wants the hearers to see God in a different light.

This parable is more about prayer than it is about judges or righteousness or widows. Here, we see how prayer is to be seen in the Christian tradition and how it is not always about receiving what we might expect or having things given to us on our timetables. Instead, prayer is presented as continual and persistent, hurling its petitions against long periods of silence.² From what we know in human experience, we could all name how there seems to be delay of prayers being answered and how God’s mysterious ways often leave us in a state of persistence or of despair. Yet like the widow, we see how the life of prayer is a constant asking, seeking, knocking, and waiting, trust sometimes fainting, sometimes growing angry.³ Yet we continue because it is part of the persistence of life to seek what is right and good, what brings us hope for the future.

¹ Craddock, Fred B. “Luke.” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 209.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 210.

Application

God's view of justice is probably different than ours. We often like to think we have a pretty good understanding of what is just or fair. There is a reason we have courts and systems which allow for due process. We have come a long way in the past several hundred years in determining who was at fault and who was in the clear. Even still, there are times I wonder if we still have a full understanding of the justice of God.

In today's lesson we get a chance to think about how God's justice plays out in the case of the persistent widow and the judge. The judge is not moved by any act of pity or desire to do the right thing. Instead, he acts based on the persistence of the widow, who seeks for justice. In her case, she is advocating for herself when there is no one who will speak up for her. She sees justice is something she will have to pursue.

History has shown there have always been people who have pursued justice on their own. Whether it is the elderly for rights around health care/pension funds to the African American community for voting rights, there is a place where God's justice for others has not come easily. Instead, it becomes a place where people must bargain and constantly push the systems we find ourselves in to get what is fair or just. If we do not fall into groups such as those, we might ask ourselves what the prayers of those around us, people who feel moved to seek justice to receive their basic needs and have their concerns addressed. A good place might be to start by asking what God's justice looks like in this situation.

We also hear of a call to think of equality in today's parable. It can be so tempting to say we understand everyone as equal in this life. Yet to be truly equal means everyone receives the same rights and privileges. It means people are not discriminated against in any way and they are seen as being owed the same rights and privileges as those around them. As we read this parable, we would be wise to reflect on if we know of how equality plays out in the lives of those around us, whether it is a widow or those who fall into vulnerable positions of society.

The final call for us as we read this parable is to think about how we understand our prayer life and how it plays out as the example in this text. As Jesus tells this parable, he is making a point about how we understand our prayer lives and coming to God. Hopefully we see our prayers as something to pursue even if it feels like the prayers do not arrive with the destination we have in mind. It is as we pray, we continue to come to God with all the things heavy on our heart and God continues to hear them and we feel God's presence. Just like the persistence of the widow, when we offer up our prayers unto God, we are seeing how God does not abandon or leave us out to dry. Instead, God wants us to continue to pour out prayers as God will encourage us to move forward in life.

The parable of the judge and the widow reminds us how Jesus uses stories to help us think through life and to see multiple meanings in a story. In what started out as a parable teaching us how to consider prayer, we also see God inviting us to revisit concepts like God's justice and equality. Throughout his ministry, Jesus was not afraid to push people to connect their spiritual life to their daily living, making the point on how the two could not be separated from each other. As followers of Jesus, they needed to see how things such as their persistence of prayer should connect to how they interacted with all of God's people and how they were to view all as equal in God's sight.

How do you understand prayer to be a persistent spiritual discipline? What does it mean to consider God's justice? Who are people you see treated unfairly in today's world? How

should our spiritual lives connect to our daily living? How does this parable speak to your life?

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