

July 15, 2018

Lesson 7: The Widow and the Unjust Judge

Scripture: Luke 18:1-8

Context:

Today's lesson looks at one of Jesus's parables towards the end of the Gospel of Luke. An initial reading of the parable of the widow and the unjust judge would suggest that Jesus is talking about prayer as mentioned in the first verse of the pericope. Upon a reexamination along with the following verses after the passage, one picks up on the focus of the grace of God as the main point.

The parable is told with the description of a widow who continues to come to an unjust judge, known for disrespecting the people and not fearing God. Finally, the judge relents and gives the woman her justice against her adversary because of her insistence. He gives in because he knows she will continue to bother him, coming in day after day until she wins her case.

At first glance, one would perhaps assert that God was the unjust judge and this parable is about our insistence in crying out to God. However, the passage is about God's vindication as the God who upholds, justifies, exonerates, and confirms people.¹ The widow is a faithful saint, persistent to advocate for herself and for justice. She stands against the one who is supposedly bigger, more powerful, and threatening. Just as the cruel judge gives way to the unrelenting pressure of the widow, God will much more listen to the prayers of the saints and those of the faith.² In this text, God is the untold character who is bigger than any power in the ancient world. His love and justice surpass that of any judge, righteous or unrighteous.

As a parable, Jesus would have told this story to give hope to those who were listening, especially those who may have felt oppressed, alienated, and disempowered. While there were certainly higher social classes among the Jewish people in the first century, there was also the added layer of being under the Roman Empire. Only Roman citizens were given legal recognition, dismissing the rights of the all social classes of conquered people. Many of the higher social classes were still not Roman citizens, so there was constant tension in conquered territories.

Jesus was making a political statement with this parable. He was saying that God was for the people, even more so than those sitting in the places of power. Their constant prayers and even their oppressed status lifted them up in the eyes of God. In the first and second century church, this parable would have reminded early Christians that God was with them no matter what they faced.

Application

Today's text is one of hope and reminds us of God's deep love for us. It also gives us the encouragement to be persistent and faithful followers of Jesus. As we read this

¹ Fred B. Craddock, "Luke," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY, 1990), 208.

² *Ibid.*, 209.

text, we are reminded that persistence is tied to discipline and consistency.

When picturing the widow, I do not imagine someone who is meek and mild, content to let anything come her way and just accept it. I see someone who is driven and active. She is like the matriarch of the church who does not let age or height keep her from speaking up and stepping up to the plate.

As I read this text, I think of the persistent followers of Jesus I know. They come in all shapes and sizes, and from different walks of life. There is the dedicated Sunday school teacher who shows up whether it is a class of two or fifteen. There is the retired pastor who offers to go on visits when the pastors are head deep with the life of the church. There is the teenager who keeps inviting their friends on the mission trips and the fun trips with the hope of having them become a regular member of the youth group.

These are the kinds of Christians needed in today's world. There is always the realization that we are against all sorts of things out of our control. We cannot make parents take their children to church. We cannot control sickness, death, and crises. We cannot make someone become a disciple of Jesus. There are so many things that are not the way we would have them and it is easy to become discouraged and hopeless. We may think that even our attempts to reach new people are futile.

Yet we can try and be persistent in our own calling to do what we know is the right thing to do. We may fail and we may not get it right the first time, but that should not hold us back. We are to be faithful followers of Jesus doing the right thing and follow whatever mission or call God has given us. Christ has given us the marching orders not to be successful by human standards, but in the mission of spreading his love and doing the right thing.

Your outreach in the community may not draw the people you attempted to reach, but you learn about communication or teamwork with other church members. That one faithful child in the Sunday school class grows up to be an active lay person and future SPRC Chair, remembering the faithfulness of their Sunday school teacher. The wandering teen, going from youth event to youth event, turns back to the church later in life because they remembered the kindness of the people there and how much they loved them even when they weren't sure they believed in God.

We never know how God will use us as faithful, persistent followers of Christ. So we just keep going, doing what we are called to do. We are God's chosen people, called to a life of justice and mercy.

Rev. E. Hunter Pugh
Associate Pastor
First United Methodist Church
1380 W. Main St.
Dothan, AL 36301
Office (334) 793-3555 ext. 240
E-mail: hunter@fumcdothan.org

