

Pentecost 22 – October 16, 2016
The Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge
Genesis 32:22-31
Psalm 121
2 Timothy 3:14 – 4:5
Luke 18:1-8
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Fellow ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,
Gracia y paz de Dios, Padre, Hijo y Espiritu Santo

Grace to you and peace from the God of Justice,
the God of Salvation and
the God of Comfort.

In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God
nor had respect for people.
In that same city was a woman who kept coming to him asking for justice.

It has been a difficult week.
It has been difficult to hear the bantering and blustering in the political arena
It has been difficult to hear the pain and outrage from women
who have come forward asking for justice.

I have laid awake all night wrestling with God about this.
I had a tidy little sermon written, some of it remains here
And some of this will be uncomfortable, for you and for me.

In the parable before us today Jesus speaks of injustice and how we are to respond.

The judge here practiced a particularly deplorable brand of injustice
Injustice against one of the least regarded members of society, a widow.
Here is a man in a position of power which he,
by his own admission is blatantly abusing.
There were lofty expectations of Israelite judges.
We find those details in 2 Chronicles and in the book of Judges.
When King Jehoshaphat appointed the first judges he instructed them to
“judge not on behalf of human beings but on the Lord’s behalf”.
Jehoshaphat goes on to exhort the newly appointed judges:
“Now, let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take care what you do,
for there is no perversion of justice with the Lord our God”.

This judge was most likely commissioned using the same exhortation.

Yet, the narrative AND the judge himself tell us that he
“has no fear of God and no respect for anyone”.

Meet the who widow comes to him, repeatedly pleading for justice
against her oppressor.

We don't know who her oppressor is,
but we can make some fairly well-educated guesses.

Recall the social standing of widows in this ancient context.
Women did NOT speak up for themselves, especially not to a judge.
Women were the property of their husbands.
In the case of a widow her nearest male relative,
her husband's or her own, was to care for her.

The parable does not identify her oppressor nor the nature of the injustice.
Her opponent could have been the very male relative
who was supposed to be caring for her.

The injustice could have been that this male relative was not caring for her needs.

The judge is supposed to be representing God,
instead he is unmoved by the widow's plea for justice.
He is unmoved by her. Period.
Instead, he ignores her complaint.

But she is not cowed by his disregard.
Instead, she boldly and repeatedly faces him and demands justice.

The judge eventually relents.
But, listen to his reasoning:
“because this widow keeps bothering me,
I will grant her justice,
so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.”

Many of the translations we read would lead us to believe that the judge
simply tires of her persistence and wants to rid himself of the bother.
Consider for a moment how the scene changes when we engage
a literal translation of the Greek word *hypopiazein* in verse 5:
Hypopiazein literally means “to blacken the eye”.

Now we see a man who is afraid for his reputation as a tough guy.
He will not be cowed by anyone,
certainly not by a woman.

We meet a man who may have been physically attacked by complainants
because of his wanton disregard for his duties.
Because he openly does not fear God nor respect anyone

The widow shows no fear, no relenting against this honor-less judge.
She is vindicated without resorting to violence.
She is vindicated because she persists in the pursuit of justice.

The pursuit of justice is hard work.
The pursuit of justice is often painful work.
The pursuit of justice often puts us on the outside
 because that's where injustice is most visible, on the margins.
Injustice is seen in the lives of the unsheltered,
 the immigrant, the abused, the "other".

Injustice lives in the halls of government
 where powerful and privileged men neither fear God nor respect people.

God's justice is served when we, like the widow relentlessly pursue justice.

When we face injustice, when we name it and denounce it,
 when we speak the truth to power even out of our weakness,
 God's justice prevails.
The widow, the disregarded, the outcast speaks truth to power and
 in her weakness becomes the powerful.
A powerful judge displays fear for his safety and honor
 while a powerless widow stands confident of what she knows to be right.
When we speak the truth to the powerful and privileged
 we knock down the walls of injustice and raise up the oppressed.

Jesus calls us to speak up against the itching ears of the powerful.
Jesus calls us to wrestle with the forces that would demean "the other".
Jesus calls us to the persistent pursuit of justice in the Kingdom of God on earth.
Jesus calls us to speak boldly against those who disrespect others.

Did not Jesus face injustice at the hands of his oppressors?
Did not Jesus hang helpless on the cross to take on the misery of an unjust world?
Did not Jesus transform injustice and helplessness into victory?

This is our victory!
Victory over injustice and cruelty through the humility and power of Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to God!