

**Scripture: Luke 18:1-8**

Every morning before I get out of bed... I turn off my alarm and, most often, I continue to lie there and I read about the news. I usually learn about a new twist in one of several pieces of news I have already been concerned about. I read about some cruel or thoughtless event – often resulting in unnecessary death. Most often I learn of a serious concern about our world which I had never given any thought to before.

And – as though this weren't enough – of course some days I wake focused entirely on personal problems or family issues. At times, those can be all-consuming to the point where following the latest news seems unwise.

So, I am lying there in bed with all these thoughts. It's not uncommon for me to have at least an undercurrent of worry, concern or anger and then I get out of bed. Good morning!

In some ways it's as though my heart yearns for justice every day. But turning that concern into requests or demands of someone who can actually bring about justice is not something I often do. I think part of the reason for that is that I don't necessarily see who I should turn to. Often, I can't imagine who could possibly offer that justice – what judge would I go before? When I think of bringing my case before someone, there is often a thought at some level that they simply won't care enough to respond. In my mind, whoever that theoretical person would be, they wouldn't care like I do. You might say I picture them as someone who will neither fear God nor have respect for others. I guess, I have also just grown tired, weary, discouraged.

Another reason is that I don't think that the problems I generally am concerned about can be addressed in a simple decision. Problems that weigh on my mind won't disappear overnight. They will likely persist. Most of the issues that weigh on me can't be addressed by a single someone else. The problems that weigh on me the heaviest are – you could say – God-sized problems.

Obviously, in some ways, what I am describing here is meant to relate to the parable we just heard. One moment in that story stands out for me: the moment of the widow repeatedly calling

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out without getting a response. It brings to mind the thirty plus chapters of Job in which he and his “friends” discuss and rant about what God is up to in the midst of Job’s suffering. Jesus himself had his own moment on the cross, asking why he had been forsaken by God. That moment of wondering when our concerns will be addressed is a human theme. When will God answer our prayer? It’s not hard to relate to that thought.

If we are facing large problems and can only imagine turning to those who lack fear of anything holy and disrespect humanity, an audience where pleas for justice are denied or refused or – worse still – ignored, then what?

When I was a young adult, I remember joining in marches, writing letters, meeting with my congress person. I haven’t done as much of that in recent years. When was the last time you were part of a protest march? When was the last time you wrote or met with your congress-person about a matter of concern? When was the last time you raised your voice for justice? Just to be fair, I am guessing that for some of us it hasn’t been that long. If so, good for you. The question remains when were your petitions actually answered with justice in some form?

It seems as though Jesus wants to position us at that moment of desperately wanting justice, persistently praying for it, and feeling as though there’s no response. That is the moment that he seems to be wanting us to imagine.

At this point, I will say that commentator Amy-Jill Levine notes that the parable itself – the story portion - doesn’t refer directly to prayer. It’s the comments before and after it – Luke’s comments – that add a framework of prayer to what we find here. In these eight verses the word “pray” is mentioned once and the word “justice” four times. Further, it doesn’t hold up either the judge or the widow as a model. The widow is seeking vengeance and – if you know Greek well enough – based on the judge’s reaction, she seems to be a bit threatening in her persistence. The judge neither fears God nor respects others – or seem to care about justice. This commentator concludes that we need to find our own moral compass.

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I would side more with Luke who concludes essentially that God’s justice is beyond anything that humans manage or maybe even imagine. We are to pursue justice, to fear God and to respect others – something that neither the widow nor the judge manages. We are to strive for something that neither one of them pulls off.

The reason why Jesus is telling the story in the first place is because we have a hard time imagining God in the way God responds to our prayers, especially when we’re in the midst of a period of feeling as though He hasn’t.

What are you to do when it seems as though your efforts and your hopes lead to nothing? What do you do when justice is not forthcoming? What do you do when you’re facing someone who has no respect for God or for individuals?

When all is said and done, will we be found persisting in the pursuit of justice? Will we continue to strive to have things set right? Or will we be found wanting?

Up until now I have been primarily urging us to pursue justice as the widow does – though maybe not with the same approach. I wouldn’t urge us to seek vengeance or threaten others and I am guessing that was not the point Jesus was trying to make. I think here we are called to be persistent in seeking to set things right.

But what about the judge? Is there anything we can learn from him? Are we ever the one who does not fear God when something is asked of us? Do we have a respectful, human-sized response to the human-sized problems that are brought before us for our attention, when we are asked to make things right?

Whatever vantage point you adopt in considering this parable, here’s what I wonder.

Have you given up on justice? Have you lost heart? Do not. Do not lose heart. Do not give up on the pursuit of justice.

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Persist with love. Live with respect of others and love of God and a heart for justice. All the while, pray, keeping in mind that there will always be much beyond our control and our efforts will only come to fruition in God's time.

Respect. Endure. Persist. Amen.