

Year C, Proper 24
Jeremiah 31:27-34; Psalm 119:97-104
2 Timothy 3:14-4:5; Luke 18:1-8
St. Catherine's Episcopal Church
October 16, 2016

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells a parable about an unjust judge and a poor widow woman. Like all parables, this story has more than one layer of meaning. It was intended, Luke tells us, to remind the disciples about the need for persistence in prayer and in their lives. An obvious interpretation when reading this Gospel is to cast ourselves in the role of the widow, pleading with God night and day until finally our prayers are answered. We know, of course, that God is not like the unjust judge of the parable; but the implication is that if even such a wicked man will give in when he tires of the widow's pleas, then surely a just, merciful, and loving God will be that much swifter to answer our prayers.

But today, let's look at this parable from a different angle. Let's suppose that this widow, with her persistent demands for justice, represents God, and WE are the unjust judge, who neither feared God nor had respect for people. Imagine that it is God who continually calls us, who continually asks for something from us, who just won't let us alone until our resistance is broken down.

In fact, in the history of God's people, this does seem to describe the way God often behaves. Remember Jonah, running in the other direction from Nineveh but finding that he couldn't run far enough to get away from God. Think of St. Paul, breathing righteousness in his persecution of the people of The Way, until God caught up with him on the road to Damascus. Think of St. Augustine, reveling in his profligate life until his conversion, and writing the beautiful lament, "Late have I loved thee, O Beauty so ancient and new. Late have I loved thee."

Doesn't God sometimes act like this with us? Perhaps God has been persistent in calling us to knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps we have strayed from the path, for however long or short a time, and have heard God's voice calling us to come home. Or perhaps it is not so much that we have strayed, but rather that we have become complacent in our Christian lives and we hear God calling us to a deeper commitment. In whatever ways God calls us, the common experience is that God is persistent. We may not always want to hear God's call. We may have our own agenda, perhaps putting our trust in the things of this world instead of in God. Perhaps we are willing to give just so much, but we are holding back on the total commitment that God wants from us. There are as many ways to run from God's persistent call as there are human beings. But God doesn't stop calling. God really is kind of like that widow woman.

Speaking of the widow, remember that what she was so persistently pleading for in this parable was justice. God calls us also to further the cause of justice in this world. Remember the words from the prophet Micah: "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." When we renew our Baptismal vows, we promise to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our

neighbors as ourselves, to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being.

In what ways does God call us to strive for justice and peace this week? It may be in our business practices, or in the way we treat others, especially those less fortunate than ourselves. Right here in the Reno/Sparks area, we've welcomed two Congolese families and three Syrian families. Three more Syrian families will be coming in the next few weeks. Local churches and individuals have reached out in Christian love to their brothers and sisters. As I said to you last week, this is not an either/or situation but a both/and situation. We don't stop helping the homeless in Reno because we're helping refugees. While St. Catherine's has given mightily to the Volunteers of America shelter, St. Vincent's Dining Room, the Children's Cabinet, Kids' Kottage and the underserved at Double Diamond Elementary, if we wait until all the homelessness in Reno is fixed, we'll never get to even two dozen of the 63 million who are currently displaced in our world. The widow woman was persistent in her demands for justice, and so must we be. And when we do that, we behave in a God-like way. We make ourselves available, and God uses us, often in ways that weren't what we expected.

Susi Lockard wrote in The Upper Room publication several years ago of just such an outcome. "When my children were infants and I rocked them to sleep, I sang to them and prayed for them. I remember holding my 14-month-old son and praying for his future relationships with his roommates, his friends, his wife. For years, I came back to the same prayer. I know I must have wearied the Lord with my prayers; but Matthew 7:7 tells us to keep on asking, seeking and knocking.

"When my son went off to college, I couldn't wait to hear about his roommate. "Well, Mom, he is a recovering drug addict. He was sent here for a year of rehabilitation and is studying art, taking part in sports, and trying to re-enter normal life."

"I felt as if God had let me down, and my disappointment came through. "I don't understand. I have prayed for 18 years for you to have a good roommate who would have a good influence in your life."

"My son, wiser than I, answered, "Maybe his mother was praying the same prayer." My son knew that he had been nurtured all his life and now had a chance to nurture a young man with serious problems.

"God answers our prayers from wisdom greater than ours. I thought that my son needed a strong Christian friend; God knew that my son needed to *be* a strong Christian friend."

Brothers and sisters, throughout our lives God continues to call us. God's call is persistent, and as long as we live it will continue. We will never arrive at the place where we can say, "There, now I've done it all. God will ask no more of me." God's call may be different at different times in our lives, but there is always more. At times we listen well, at times perhaps not so well, but God's voice is never stilled. Each time we hear and respond, we become more the person God calls us to be.

Mother Teresa had a set of small yellow cards that contained words of wisdom for herself and her community. She called them her “business cards,” and they served as a kind of guidebook for walking the bridge to God. The cards said: The fruit of silence is prayer. The fruit of prayer is faith. The fruit of faith is love. The fruit of love is service. The fruit of service is peace. I have a card for each of you to take with you today. I hope they might guide our words to God’s ears. Amen.