

Sermon at the Cathedral Eucharist

readings: [Genesis 32.22-31](#) , [2 Timothy 3.14-4.5](#) [Luke 18.1-8](#)

16 October 2022

To many of you this will be a well-known parable ... and, given Luke's way of focusing on issues of power and justice and on those found on the margins of society, it should come as no surprise to find elements of all of that too. However, familiarity with Scripture doesn't mean it has nothing to say to us, it is after all, as Timothy reminds us 'inspired by God' and 'useful' for our ongoing lives as followers of Jesus.

So – we have 2 main characters:

A widow: in Jesus' time a person with no rights ... a woman without a husband, unless taken in by her family, had no 'protection', no-one to provide, no-one to advocate or speak up for her

A judge: male and prominent in society ... and unpleasant to boot – no respect for God or anyone & prone to exasperation!

Given the power imbalance, it really shouldn't work out the way it does, should it? What a relief it does!

But the widow just won't stop, like a dog with a bone, she keeps going – you can imagine it: being there when he comes out of court, being at the city gates where judgements were often made, pushing her way to the front of anyone gathered there to ask 'What about my complaint?', maybe turning up at his home and banging on the door – a real pest, an irritant, a nuisance ... 'Give me justice' Her passion for justice burns inside her, a righteous anger that fuels her.

And then, maybe, the judge finding that other people start asking him about her – why does she keep turning up? What's she going on about? A risk of reputational damage for the judge maybe, losing face in the eyes of his peers? Eventually, he gives in, not because he should have done and with no sense of apology, but because he just wants to shut her up and get rid of her irritating, annoying presence.

A parable about the need to pray always and never give up? How does that work?

You can understand the parallel with the widow – we can imagine her representing us, or others in society but the judge? Is that what God is like?

No! Jesus (referenced here as 'the Lord') says: 'Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice ...'

If even a corrupt, self-focussed, intransigent judge can eventually be worn down, how much more will God, who is the antithesis of the characteristics the judge in the parable displays, grant justice.

God, who is the one who is and will be judge of all, is nothing like the judge in this story.

And yet I wonder how often we, almost subconsciously maybe, think that he might be ... and stop praying, stop asking because of a falsely deferential fear that somehow we'll really bug him if we keep going on and on and on? I leave that thought for you to ponder.

So how do we keep praying and never give up? What fuels us and what gives us that drive to persist? How do we overcome the discouragements we face?

Let me try to give some answers by telling you a little about my own struggle in one particular area – an issue of justice on a huge scale that I have almost given up on so many times.

A while back now (over 40 years!) I had the privilege of studying geography at University. At the same time, the person who became my husband, was studying biology at a different University. We were then both people of faith. We both, on our different courses came across references to something called 'climate change' ... and since then we have prayed, our prayers have at various times become action (members of Greenpeace, supporters of TearFund) because that happens when you pray, we've almost despaired, almost given up and have been aghast at the length of time it has taken to become 'main-stream'. What is it that has kept us praying (with varying degrees of engagement and enthusiasm)?

It is the knowledge that there is vindication now for the children of God (as there was for the widow) and will be fully (the now and not yet of the Kingdom); that our hope is in the one who has and will bring all things to justice, that the creation, the cosmos, will be healed, restored and utterly glorious (Timothy reminds us of that in our Epistle – ours is not a vain hope and in the meantime we 'proclaim the message'). Jesus reminds us in the Gospel that God WILL grant justice – not might, no ifs or buts, but WILL – it is our sure and certain hope in Christ Jesus.

Yes, realistically and honestly our motivation to pray will ebb and flow – there will be times of wrestling, intense prayer as with Jacob and there will be times when it is 'just' an act of will, a result of following Paul's exhortation to pray without ceasing - but we are allowed to come boldly before the throne of grace (as the writer to the Hebrews reminds us) and bring our cries for justice (personal, global and everything in-between) to the one who vindicates with perfect justice.

And when we find it difficult to persist? My experience is that God, in his mercy, re-energises and re-focuses us, drawing us back to Scripture, to his story and to all that we know Him to be, sometimes through our heartfelt groans, sometimes through his people and our regular worship ... and sometimes graciously, he nudges us in particular and personal ways: earlier this week, in the evening, we brought our granddaughter (6) to see Gaia. It was dark. We held her hand and covered her eyes as we came in and then stood in the middle near the start of the aisle and let her see. 'Oh wow'

God rekindled my heart to pray for climate justice in that moment.

Where does your heart need re-kindling at the moment? What is the burning in your bones that turns you to prayer (and maybe action) as you consider the world today? How might you persist in prayer ... and is your trust firmly rooted in the one who vindicates now and will do at the end of all things?

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