

Today's parable in Luke's Gospel is unique only to Luke and can either be seen as clear and straight forward or really difficult in terms of interpretation. Scholars have varied interpretations when looking at today's parable. Today I'd like to focus mainly on the widow in the story. But before reading today's parable, let us first look at the context. "Jesus' parable falls near the end of his journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51-19:27) and immediately following his teaching about the coming of God's kingdom and the end times (Luke 17:20-37)" (Brittany E. Wilson, workingpreacher.org). Luke wrote his account several decades after Jesus had ascended into heaven. Jesus' followers were living in uncertain times, and they were persecuted for their faith. One scholar put it this way, "Rome was standing over Jerusalem like a vulture over a corpse and there was no sign of the kingdom coming anytime soon. Jesus had said he would be right back, only he was not back. People were losing heart, so Luke repeated the story Jesus had told, about the wronged widow who could not stop pleading her case" (Barbara Brown Taylor, *Home By Another Way*, p. 199). "The parable of the widow's persistence is introduced as a parable about prayer and not losing heart, then moves into a story about justice, and ends with a question about faith" (Meda Stamper, workingpreacher.org). So let's dive in! But before we do, let us first pray. **PRAY. READ.** Luke 18:1-8.

We aren't told what the widow's complaint is; nonetheless, many gather that it is about her deceased husband's estate. Some say that under Jewish law that widows cannot inherit it, as it goes straight to their sons or brothers-in-law, but they aren't allowed to live off of it unless

someone is taking that away from them. And we know what God says in the Old Testament about protecting the widows, orphans and immigrants. Luke mentions throughout his Gospel a good number of widows involved in Jesus' ministry. From them we might certainly say that they're vulnerable. However, an aside- even though we stereotype widows (for justified reasons) as poor, the truth is that some were rather wealthy- as well as prophetic, active, and faithful" (Stamper).

The widow in today's parable is by herself before the judge, pleading her case. Women's voices weren't always heard or respected as much as men's. Thank goodness that's not the case today. I'm guessing this widow stood out like a sore thumb- a public spectacle. Yet, she does not seem to lose heart. She doesn't back down. She knows what she wants- what is right- and she knows who can give her justice. Whether the judge gives it to her or not, well, that is out of her control but that doesn't seem to matter to this widow. "She was willing to say what she wanted- out loud, day and night, over and over- whether she got it or not, because saying it was how she remembered who she was. It was how she remembered the shape of her heart" (Taylor). I saw a quote by Khalil Gibran this week that helped me to make a connection between prayer and this widow's persistent heart. "Prayer is the song of the heart. It reaches the ear of God even if it is mingled with the cry and tumult of a thousand..." This widow's story helps us to connect prayer with public action. "This widow needed justice that private prayer alone would not deliver. We aren't called to pray passively, hoping that God will change the world on our behalf. Prayer may be the wind at our

backs, but sometimes we need to track down the answer in person. As the African proverb says, ‘When you pray, move your feet’” (Maggi Dawn, *The Christian Century*, 10.2.07).

Society expected this widow to uphold the dignity and honor of her family, community and tribe- maintain the status quo- not stir the pot- don’t cause any good trouble- don’t rock the boat! She was to bow to the laws of the community- “Oh well, that’s just the way it is.” “We can’t change the law. Sorry. It’s always been that way.” One scholar shares, “She would have never believed it herself- how exhilarating it was to stop trying to phrase things the right way, to stop going through proper channels and acting grateful for whatever scraps life dropped on her plate. There were no words for the relief she [must have] felt when she finally threw off her shame, her caution, her self-control and went straight to the source to say exactly what she wanted. *Give me justice!* she yelled at the judge. *Do your job! Answer me now or answer me later, but I am coming back every day and every night- forever- until you deal with me*” (Taylor). That’s exactly the sentiment I read in the New York Times this week from several parents and a sibling of the shooting victims in Uvalde, TX. Kimberly Rubio, whose daughter, Alexandria, known as “Lexi,” was slain, read out loud- while holding a photo of Lexi- a section of the Uvalde Police Department’s mission statement. It reads, “The department is committed to providing superior police service to the public in order to protect life.” Rubio’s voice quivered as she read and then she looked up and “gained fire in her voice, saying “What I want no one can give me. I want my daughter back. If I can’t have her,

then those who failed her will never know peace.” They held a rally last Sunday in their first collective call for accountability and justice. Javier Cazares, who lost his 9 year-old daughter, Jackie, said “the seed for the rally was planted the day he stood over her body and made a vow that her death would not be in vain.” “I want her remembered,” Mr. Cazares said. “I promised her we’re going to fight [for justice]. I’m not afraid to speak my mind and will continue to do so, so these families know that they are not alone”([article](#)).

I’m hoping and praying that what happened to the widow in this story will also happen eventually for these grief-stricken families. Justice will be served. God can do much with little! God will take your faithful persistence and turn it into power! Because the widow never gave up- she just kept on coming- until she wore the powers-that-be out. Turn to your neighbor and say, “She wore him out!” Her persistence- her tenacity and call for justice come across in a way that the judge characterizes her actions as those of a boxer. “In the original Greek, the judge says: because this widow causes trouble for me, I will give her justice, so that she may not, in the end, give me a black eye by her coming. We are probably meant to laugh at this topsy-turvy picture of a lowly widow pummeling a recalcitrant arbiter of justice. But the humor in this scene is not one of comic relief. Instead it pokes fun at the powers-that-be. We laugh, though, in order to challenge such figures, and ultimately, to offer a different way” (Wilson). The widow wore the judge out until he relented and settled the woman’s claim. The unjust judge is not respectable by his own admission. He doesn’t fear God or

respect anyone. Yet, he finally yields to this widow because he doesn't want to walk around town with a bad reputation.

Sometimes it takes extreme, even socially unacceptable behavior to effect change. It also takes a willingness to keep showing up and not give up. Shame researcher, Brene Brown, says that hope is a function of struggle. She says that the two prerequisites for high level hopefulness are: 1) perseverance and 2) tenacity- both of which this widow possessed" ([video](#)). One thing is certain: like the widow, our living should be accompanied by ceaseless prayer. However, we aren't supposed to wait quietly for Jesus' return and accept our fates in an oppression-ridden world. We too, must be people of hope and persistence in our call for justice. As Luke explains in the parable Jeff preached on a few weeks ago, "prayer is not a passive activity but one that actively seeks God and purses God's will. Like the widow, we are to persevere in the faith, crying out to God day and night. This is what persistent prayer looks like" (Wilson). I've told you all about the Justice Network and our partnership with it here in Greenville. They're presently 18 committed communities of faith (and soon hopefully more) working together to do justice. We're gearing up to hold conversation groups here at Triune in September on issues of injustice in our community that keep you up at night or make you angry. Your stories and voices need to be heard. Then those will be taken to a larger group with our faith communities in the Greenville area and whittled down to a few that will then be voted on by all of us. Then a group of people will research the issue of injustice as well as contact the people in power-

who have the ability to make effective change and invite them to meet with us as we hold them accountable for their elected office or position of power. People of faith in Charleston and Columbia, as well as in countless other cities across the US, are not giving up but standing up for justice while in continual prayer and justice is being given...sometimes very slowly- some are still waiting. If you're interested in joining us, we'll be sharing how you can get involved in the coming weeks and months.

"Listen to what the unjust judge says," Jesus says to his disciples. This is the part he wants us to pay attention to. *Won't God do the same for you? If you cry out both day and night, will God delay long in helping you too?*" (Taylor). The powerful and just God takes the place of the unjust judge in the end, granting justice to his vulnerable, chosen ones who cry to him day and night. However, our lived experiences contradict this explanation sometimes. Many times we feel that God does delay and our persistent prayers for healing, justice, protection, or peace go unanswered. The work of prayer is hard, and it's also a great mystery, as we can't know why some prayers are answered quickly and some are not. "Maybe what's at stake is not who God is and how God operates in the world but who we are, and why we need so desperately to be people of persistent prayer" (Debie Thomas, journeywithjesus.net)? I don't know about you but when I lose heart, I lose direction in my faith and can become quite cynical. Not the widow- at least not in today's parable. She is purposeful, precise, alive and clear in her actions. Yet, her only powers in this story are the power of showing up persistently

and public dishonoring- threatening the judge's reputation- this was the use of social media of her day. "But the story suggests that these powers are not to be taken lightly. Which is to say, prayer is not to be taken lightly. If God did it one time, God will do it again and again. We can't always know what gets shaken, transformed, upended, or vindicated simply because we show up again and again in prayer" (Thomas).

How do we not lose heart in our quest for justice? Jesus asks at the end of this parable when he returns again if he'll find faith on the earth? Faith that persists? Faith that wears people in power out- nonviolently, of course- until justice is served? What will he find among us? Amen.