

Luke 18:1-8

¹Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. ²He said, 'In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. ³In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, "Grant me justice against my opponent." ⁴For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, "Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, ⁵yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming." ' ⁶And the Lord said, 'Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? ⁸I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?'

God's Justice Comes Quickly

Today we celebrate Peace with Justice Sunday, though I don't think 'celebrate' is quite the right word; the scourges of war and injustice overshadow peace and justice in much of the world. So let's just say we recognize the day and accept that we have a long way to go before true peace and true justice are achieved.

And the two words, 'peace' and 'justice,' should always be linked together, because you can't have one without the other. If there is injustice in the world, then someone out there is NOT at peace. As long as you are not the victim of injustice, you may feel at peace, but that sense of peace will quickly be shattered when the injustice affects you in some direct way. I remember repeatedly getting bills for a college loan that I had fully paid off, and even after calling the Student Loan Authority repeatedly and providing proof of payment repeatedly I continued to get debt collection notices. My sense of peace was shattered as I felt the student loan authority had done me a great injustice, and I even wrote to my congressional representative, seeking justice. I was not at peace until I received a notice from the student loan authority confirming that my debt was paid.

I was lucky; my appeal to my congressional representative resulted in an inquiry and a JUST resolution. But how do you think I would have felt if I had NOT received a letter back from congress, if the bill collection notices had kept coming and kept growing more and more threatening? How do you think I would have felt if I was turned down for a home loan or my wages were garnished due to this erroneous bill? How do you think I would think I would have felt if I was threatened with arrest of imprisonment for a crime I never committed? I'm lucky that this matter was resolved, but every day there are people who are wrongfully accused, wrongfully imprisoned, or just treated unfairly, people who cannot count on the powers-that-be to administer justice.

This is the kind of situation Jesus describes in today's Gospel lesson. Jesus offers us this parable to encourage us to pray and not lose heart, but the situation that he describes is significant; how many prayers are appeals for justice? I would guess that a lot of them are. And in this world, how quickly does justice come to those who appeal for

it? It may take generations before justice comes to some people. It may take centuries or even millennia. One vulnerable group that is often mentioned in the Bible is widows. Widows were expected to be cared for by their families. They were even expected to marry their husband's brother. But care for the widow varied depending upon whether she had produced a male heir for her husband and whether or not it was convenient for her husband's brother to marry her, so you can imagine that a lot of widows were thrown to the curb, treated unjustly in ancient Israel and would need to sue for support. And I imagine that a court system that was dominated by men and easily corrupted could very easily ignore the pleas of a widow, who didn't have the resources to offer bribes or payoffs. And because the Bible makes numerous references to how widows should be taken care of there were probably a lot of problems with the way they were treated. There were probably any number of widows and unjust judges receiving numerous appeals from such widows who just wanted to be treated fairly. And Jesus says to them, and to anyone else who suffers injustice or who ally themselves with those who suffer injustice, "Keep praying! Even the unjust judge eventually gives this widow justice; God will certainly administer justice, and do so quickly.

Now you should be wondering how quickly God administers justice, because we know that some people who are treated unjustly suffer injustice their entire lives, and sometimes that injustice is carried on for generations. What does Jesus mean when he says that God brings justice quickly to those who suffer injustice? Today, I want us to look at God's justice, and how it actually triumphs over injustice *in the here and now* in ways that you might not recognize.

We often think of God's judgment as a future event; those who oppress others in this life will be punished in the afterlife, and those who are oppressed in this life will be rewarded in the afterlife. And that may be so. But I want to argue that God's judgment is going on right here and now, on both the oppressed and the oppressor in ways that affect the oppressors in bad ways in the here and now and benefit the oppressed in the here and now. Please don't think that I'm advocating oppression by noting some of the positive results of being oppressed. What I'm trying to do is show that because we are created in God's image people who persistently call on God are able to rise above any kind of oppression that this world may inflict upon them, and that those who oppress others or are complicit in the oppression of others suffer consequences in the here and now. Let me explain...

First, injustice is evil, pure and simple. To treat another person unfairly is wrong and we don't need to quibble about it. But evil is a very tricky thing, because we never want to see ourselves as doing anything evil, and so we disguise evil and call it good. We need to justify our injustice, and we do this by assigning ourselves to false virtues and by assigning to our victims false vices. Using racism as an example, we should ask, "How did Europeans justify slavery on the basis of race?" By convincing themselves that people with light skin were smarter, or were ordained by God to rule the world, and those with darker skin were not as smart and destined to serve their lighter-skinned masters. Was there anything about lighter-skinned people that made them superior to darker-skinned people? No. The only thing you could rightfully say was that the lighter

skinned people held the right kind of weapons and employed the “right” kind of violence to effectively enslave those with darker skin, and I hardly consider that to be virtue. But lighter-skinned people, in order to justify the evil that they perpetrated against others, propagated lies about those they oppressed (they are less-intelligent, unable to care for themselves, uncivilized, primitive, and, yes, morally bankrupt). All these were lies that the lighter-skinned people needed to believe in order for them to continue to deny justice to those they enslaved. And what was the cost that lighter-skinned people paid (or continue to pay) for the injustices that they imposed on others? Moral insanity. When your mind tricks itself into believing a lie in order to mistreat others, that’s moral insanity.

And if the oppressor persists in our oppression based upon race, the oppressor finds himself to be completely **UNDIGNIFIED**. By undignified I mean exactly that: **WITHOUT DIGNITY**. Because if you deceive yourself into thinking that you are better than someone else simply based upon race...or gender, or nationality...you become morally lazy believing yourself to be virtuous simply because of the color of your skin, or your family name, or your gender orientation, or any number of false measures, and you eventually discover that there really is nothing of substance that makes you virtuous. And if you are blessed you will discover the error in your thinking and make amends. If not you’ll remain insane.

But what happens to the oppressed? What happens to the victim of injustice? Well there is the unfortunate chance that they will fall into despair, that they will start to believe the lie that has been perpetrated that there is something inferior about them, something wrong with them. One of the tragedies of the injustice that has been levied against the LGBTQ community is that they suffer a higher incidence of suicide than the population at large in part because they may come to believe the lie that there is something “wrong” with the way they feel, and because they can’t escape those feelings they end their own lives. That is one possible outcome.

But the other outcome is something quite different, and that is a sense of dignity, a sense of pride, a sense of recognition that **REGARDLESS OF WHAT THE BIGGOTS AND RACISTS AND CHAUVENISTS MIGHT SAY, THEY ARE BEAUTIFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE. THEY ARE GOD’S CHILDREN**. Often their dignity is defined by their perseverance in the face of discrimination and oppression. We can talk about gay pride and we can talk about black pride precisely because they **CAN** be proud of their perseverance in the face of discrimination. God raises them up, affirming to them that they are beautifully and wonderfully made despite the lies that they are fed by those who wish to keep them down.

That is God’s justice in the here and now. The Holy Spirit informs the victims of injustice that they are beautifully and wonderfully made, and that those who treat them unjustly are **ALSO** wonderfully made but are out of touch with reality. They are in **LA LA LAND**.

The point is that God loves us all, the oppressor and the oppressed, and while he works within the oppressed to help them find their dignity he also works within the oppressor to open their eyes to the lie that they’re living. The oppressor finds no peace in his heart

and mind so long as the oppressed show themselves to be undeserving of the oppression that is laid upon them. Consciously or unconsciously the oppressor must ask himself, "What justifies my actions?" And the more God works within the oppressed to dignify them, to help them discover and exhibit their virtue, the more the oppressor must ask himself, "How do I justify my actions?" And perhaps the oppressor starts to discover that the oppressed are truly free, free of sin and free of self-deception.

God loves the sinner as he loves the saint, and he works in both to bring about mental health so that both may know justice and the peace of God that passes all understanding.