

Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: Luke 18:1-8 (NT page 1052)

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Background to the reading

Our reading is quite difficult to understand.

So let us discover what lies behind our text.

Jesus made a sweeping statement about prayer and to illustrate it he told a parable.

But this parable is rather shocking. According to the parable the Judge who is a man of great honour in his society, acts in a shameful way by not respecting or honouring God or care for his fellow human beings. He is supposed to be standing in God's place looking after the widows, the orphans and the strangers. He was elected to defend the vulnerable in his society.

And then in almost the exact words, Jesus said there was a widow who came to the judge and asked him to help her. She acted in quite a shameful manner to by not addressing him properly and not acknowledging his position of not to help her. She was persistent in her efforts to get his help.

In Jesus' time the widows, the orphans and the strangers were a special group of people and strict rules applied to everyone who tried to harm them. In the parable it is also quite interesting to learn that although the judge do not fear God that he feared the widow. Actually what Luke was implying is that he feared his "honourable name and status in that society". With no benefits, child allowances and tax credits, the widows, the orphans and the strangers faced difficult times. No wonder the widow was so persistent in her cause.

But in the parable the judge fails his task. He refused to help the widow and only after she kept stalking him, he finally helps and not because he wanted to. His actions were not directed by honour, or a sense of fair justice and compassion.

So what is the parable saying?

According to our parable the judge is the insider and the widow the outsider – someone who did not have any status and was helpless. But it is not the insider to whom justice comes to but to the outsider. It is the outsider that will inherit the kingdom of God through her persistent faith. The parable's main emphasis lies in the actions of the widow "who kept coming to him, "For some time" "keeps bothering him, "so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming". The widow's shameful actions through her intrusion in the judge's social space and her continual persistence bring about justification and not the justice of her cause or the judge's honour! Likewise is the kingdom of heaven a coming reality, and who keeps bothering people regardless of honour, status or justice. It may even come under the guise of a lack of honour.

Jesus' last words emphasised exactly this. When the Son of man comes to earth will he find the shameful unjust actions of the judge or the faith of the widow among his people?

God will give justice to all those who constantly ask him. He is the fair and faithful judge who always looks with compassion at his people. In a sense our reading is not a parable at all. It is an anti-parable with the whole emphasis on the fact that God is totally different from the unjust judge.

Amen

MP 544

Open my eyes that I may see

Sermon

The verses I want to reflect on:

"⁶ And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸ I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly."

In our reading a few things are clear:

First and foremost God is totally different from any human being and in particular from the unjust judge. God is faithful and compassionate and always interacts with people in a gracious and merciful way. Unlike the human judge who did not even have compassion for the plea of the most desperate in their society, God chose to give his only Son to redeem the sinners. God did not turn his face away.

Unlike the judge, God hears the requests of his children the first time. He answers - not because He is obliged to do so, or to defend his honor or because He is harassed by all our prayers. No He answers because he loves us just as we are.

Our reading also emphasizes the lack of a meaningful relationship between the two parties. They did not relate to one another which resulted in the judge not being able to know the situation of the widow and the widow oblivious to the airt and graces of the judge. To pray is to speak to God in conversation. But we need to have a living relationship with God in able to speak to Him. And relationships always have tensions. So it is only natural that we will “wrestle” with God in prayer.

Prayer is not a matter of manipulating God to do my will — it is a conversation with God in which I discover his care and his will, and where I discover what He wants of me. Prayer is an open conversation where the possibilities are endless. God can either change what I am asking for or change me in the course of speaking to Him.

We need faith to know whom we are serving. Faith that -because we believe in the redemption of Jesus Christ – will enable us to go to God with all our worries, trials and tribulation.

The widow is our ultimate example of perseverance and commitment. If she could keep going back to such an horrible judge, how much more reason to we need to keep going to God who is loving, forgiving and merciful. We need to persevere and do what we can to speak to God – missing no opportunity which brings me to the following true story: Margaret Sangster Phippen wrote that in the mid-1950’s her father, British minister W.E. Sangster, began to notice some uneasiness in his throat and a dragging in his leg. When he went to the doctor, he found that he had an incurable disease that cased progressive muscular atrophy. His muscles

would gradually waste away, his voice would fail, and his throat would soon become unable to swallow.

Sangster threw himself into his work in the British home missions, figuring he could still write and he would have even more time for prayer. "Let me stay in the struggle Lord," he pleaded. "I don't mind if I can no longer be a general, but give me just a regiment to lead." He wrote articles and books, and helped organize prayer cells throughout England. "I'm only in the kindergarten of suffering," he told people who pitied him. Gradually Sangster's legs became useless. His voice went completely. But he could still hold a pen, shakily.

On Easter morning, just a few weeks before he died, he wrote a letter to his daughter. In it, he said, "It is terrible to wake up on Easter morning and have no voice to shout, "He is risen!" -- but it would be still more terrible to have a voice and not want to shout."

Amen.