

“The Just Widow”

Luke 18:1-8

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From the Pulpit

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A meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Saturday, October 26, 2019 on the occasion of the Central Southeast Association Meeting of the Heartland Conference of the United Church of Christ, dedicated in thanksgiving to Rev. Patricia Battle, our Association Minister and to the Rev. Dr. Bill Nirote, our Association Moderator and to all the clergy and lay members in congregations of our Association who serve Christ every day each in their own local settings and always to the glory of God!

“The Just Widow”

Luke 18:1-8

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*Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our rock and our salvation.
Amen.*

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Jesus spoke in Parables to teach lessons about justice and right relationships. In Luke 18:1-8, we read the Parable of the Unjust Judge – or as I prefer to call it – The Just Widow!

Pray and never lose heart. That is what Jesus tells us in this Parable. As the story opens, we don't know what the widow in

this story needs - although it is not hard to guess. Since she is a widow, her case probably concerns her deceased husband's estate. Under Jewish law in Jesus' time, this widow could not inherit the estate. It went straight to her sons or her brother-in-law. She could not live unless she was taken in. It appears that someone is trying to cheat her out of life itself. One can only imagine that this is the case.

The widow goes to the powerful judge who the parable tells us is not a respectable judge. By his own admission, he does not fear God AND he does not respect any person. Maybe he thinks being Godless and heartless makes him a better judge - more impartial, or something like that. Whatever the case, God does not get to him. People do not get to him. But this widow gets to him. Even though he "never gives her the time of day," she gets to him because she throws a mean right punch. In the Greek, the judge uses a boxing term to describe the widow – He fears that: *"She will give him a black eye."*

Here is how the judge talks about it, *"I care nothing what God thinks, even less what people think. But because this widow won't quit badgering me, I'd better do something and see that she gets justice— otherwise I'm going to end up beaten black-and-blue by her pounding"* (Luke 18:4-6).

The widow "badgers" the judge (by the way - watch out for Badgers today – they are everywhere!). She gives him a black eye. His self-interest for responding to her is not equity or justice, but self-conceit. He does not want to walk around town with a black

eye and make up stories about how he got a black eye. Anyone who has watched the widow at work, persistently going after the judge day and night, knows exactly where he got his black eye. The judge grants justice to save face - literally. That is the only reason justice is granted – he wants to save his face. He doesn't care about her at all...

Isn't this the way justice is granted too many times? When it is granted, it is most often granted by judges, elected leaders and others with power, money, and the laws which they have written to manipulate their power and control in society. They might have a faint interest in God and people (at best). But, they “grant justice” only when they **feel bothered and badgered by people** – especially people they perceive as powerless - immigrants, refugees, widows, orphans, foster children, women, poor children, Black people, Brown people, young people, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people who have been forsaken, forgotten and manipulated and as a result must become their own champions and advocates in this world.

And through it all, these leaders speak as though they are persecuted and picked on when in fact, they are the ones who have been granted the power and position to do the right thing - but don't. Now this certainly doesn't define everyone with power but it does define those who yield their power abusively or simply neglect to do their jobs as “public servants” and “elected officials” or “city or town leaders” in every single community.

Jesus knew these unjust judges and that is why he told this story. He still knows - that in order to save their faces, these powerful ones will spit and fume and make up stories and eventually somewhere down the line they just might do the right thing and grant justice. We would like to believe they do it for all the right reasons. But, when they have no respect for God or people, it takes the cry of those for whom persistence is their only path to break through the multiple layers of injustice and change society.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. put it this way, "*justice delayed is justice denied.*" You see, I think this "just widow," stopped by the house of another "just widow" on her way to the courthouse. I think she stopped by Dr. Coretta Scott King's house and got some tips from a widow who knew well the injustices of this world. Because when she showed up in the judge's court, she wouldn't put up with justice being delayed OR denied any longer. He knew her voice and her face. And he was scared of her right hook for all the wrong reasons.

But the passage doesn't end where justice is granted and the judge puts on make-up. Remember, I told you at the beginning, this was a parable about praying and never losing heart. At the end of the parable Jesus asks, "*But how much of that kind of persistent faith will the Son of Man find on the earth when he returns?*" (Luke 18:8).

You get the feeling Jesus didn't know many persistent widows, or at least not enough of them. That is why I am inviting Jesus to stop by here today. Come and see the Central Southeast Association in action Jesus! Come and spend some time with

your “God is still speaking” friends and followers. We are your kind of people! Stop by here Lord! Stop by here! We are persistent and just widows! While I don’t recommend using your right hook to make a point, I do recommend organizing and doing justice together. It is the only way to make permanent change – especially when those in power do not respect God or people.

To everyone in this sanctuary...Remember Jesus’ words – **Pray and Never Lose Heart!** Also remember to get up each day organize for justice and take action.

Remember the Widow and her persistence for justice! Don’t ever, ever, ever, ever give up badgering, persisting and pursuing justice! Never give up! Never give up! Never, ever, ever, ever give up!

Justice will prevail because all of us – like the Just Widow – will never give up! Amen.