

“The Just Widow”

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jeremiah 31:27-34; II Timothy 3:14-4:5; 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, dedicated to the children of the Treble Choir, Dr. Sandy Mathias, for her kind leadership of them, for the late and great Essie Cannon as she enters eternal life, for all who work for those with a mental illness especially Rachelle Martin and the dynamic staff of NAMI Franklin County and to all our children on this Children's Sabbath and always to the glory of God!

“The Just Widow”

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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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Pray and never lose heart. That is what Jesus is telling us in the Parable of the Just Widow (often called The Unjust Judge). We don't know what the widow in this story needed - although it is not hard to guess. Since she was a widow, her case probably concerns her deceased husband's estate. Under Jewish law of Jesus' time, this widow could not inherit the estate. It went straight to her sons or her brother-in-law. She is

not allowed to live off of it unless someone is trying to cheat her out of it. One can only imagine that this is the case.

The widow goes to the powerful judge who the story tells us is not a respectable judge. By his own admission, he does not fear God or 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, at least partially because she throws a mean right punch. The English translation does not show the humor, but in the Greek, the judge uses a boxing term to describe the widow. He says, “*Though I have no fear of God and respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out with continued blows under the eye.*”

She is giving him a black eye. His self-interest for responding to her is not equity or justice, but conceit. He does not want to walk around town with a black eye and have to make up stories about how he got it. Anyone seeing how the widow has been tearing into him day and night will know where he got it. Since he cannot stand that idea, the judge grants her justice to save face - literally. (Barbara Brown Taylor, Home By Another Way, Cowley Publications, Boston, Mass., 1999, p. 200).

That is the way justice is granted all too many times. It is granted by judges, elected leaders and others with power, money, and the law on their side who **feel bothered by people** – especially poor people – people of color, young people who protest injustice, women they have treated as objects, widows, orphans, immigrants, children, the forsaken, the forgotten and all who are their champions and advocates in this world. They feel persecuted and picked on when in fact they are the ones **who could choose to do the right thing but don't**. Now this **certainly doesn't define everyone with power but it does define** some who yield their power abusively.

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 injustice.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. put it this way, *“justice delayed is justice denied.”* I think this widow, stopped by the **Coretta Scott King's house** on her way to see the judge! **Because when she showed up in his court, she wouldn't put up** with justice being delayed OR denied any longer. He knew her voice and her face. He was scared of her right hook for all the wrong reasons.

“Give me justice!” the widow yelled at the judge. *“Do your job! Answer me now or answer me later, but I will be coming back every day and every night - forever - until you deal with me”*. So he dealt with her just to get her out of his face.

But, the passage doesn't end where justice is granted. 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, *“And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”* You get the feeling Jesus didn't know many persistent widows, or at least not enough of them. He didn't know folks who had enough faith to stay with the injustices of their day or anything - forever. Barbara Brown Taylor writes, *“Then as now, people prayed like they brushed their teeth - once in the morning and once at night, as part of their spiritual hygiene program”* (Ibid, pp. 201-202).

So what about us? Do we pray like we brush our teeth? Twice a day (and maybe after lunch? Or are we serious about who we are as followers of Christ and those who do justice – as the prophet Micah commanded us to do. Do we work at it? Or do we take it for granted?

There are some people in Columbus who remind me of the Just Widow. They are the people of the BREAD Organization who have championed the cause of people with mental illness or brain diseases. On Wednesday, October 19 at 4 p.m., the International Clubhouse will open at 1203 East

Broad – just a few blocks from here. We are all welcome to attend the grand opening. We, who are in BREAD, researched the needs and successful models of programs for those who suffer from brain diseases or mental illness. We discovered Cleveland and many other cities have Clubhouses. These are places where men and women come out of their homes, come from the streets, and out of their difficult struggles with depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and more to interact with others. Peer presence and peer interaction helps heal people and get them engaged in life again. We knew this. We prayed about this. Then for several years we pestered and then eventually worked beside ADAMH to make it happen. **We were “the just widow” crying out for a change we knew** needed to happen. Along the way, we made some leaders uncomfortable – to say the least. But, we believed our children and the children of others deserved a place of respite and hope in the heart of this great city. Now it is happening. Persistence and prayer. They go hand in hand.

We need to change our prayer life and our pursuit of justice from brushing twice a day to bothering God all day long. We have to keep chasing after God's heart. We have to bother God and know that God will bother us right back.

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With that I will end so we can hear the children tell us another story of persistence and prayer for which they wrote the music and words. **On this Children's Sabbath, we should** celebrate our children who teach us how to live our values of persistence and prayer which lead to justice and reconciled lives and relationships. Thanks be to God for the Just Widows of our world and for the children who model how to be beacons of light and justice on Broad Street. Amen.

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