

## **Sunday, October 16 – 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**Preacher: Rev. Douglas J. Brouwer**

**Sermon Title: “The widow and the unjust judge”**

**Scripture Reading: Luke 18:1-8**

(The second reading for next Sunday will be Jeremiah 31:27-34. Though my sermon will focus on the parable in Luke 18, the Old Testament reading from Jeremiah serves to illuminate what Jesus discusses with his disciples – namely, that in the gathering gloom of the world situation, we need not fear because God has a plan. For Jeremiah the plan was to make a new covenant written, as he puts it, on our hearts. Jesus’ parable ends a bit more ominously – vs. 8 “...when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”)

1. As I mentioned in my notes last week, Luke takes a special interest in the outcast and marginalized, and though I mentioned women, I failed to mention widows, who had an especially precarious existence in the first century world. Without a husband or father, they had no legal standing and were entirely at the mercy of the men in their communities. The tiny bit of power they had was the ability to raise their voices, which they apparently did when they had to, as in this parable. The status of women in the world has changed considerably – at least in the west – but not entirely. To understand this parable requires us to understand and grasp what it means to have no social standing, no voice, no reason that anyone should listen to us. Do you know anyone like that? Have you ever felt like that?
2. The judge in the parable is a bit of a caricature, but not entirely. Every culture, it seems, has at least some corruption – those who use their power for their own benefit. The judge in this parable “neither feared God nor had a respect for people.” That’s bad enough, but his situation was even worse. This judge was unable to feel shame. He did not see the evil of his actions in the presence of one who should make him ashamed. He is hurting a destitute widow. He should feel shame. (This is the same issue in Luke 20:13, where the tenants of the vineyard are unable to feel shame over their actions.) Shame played a large role in first century life – not so much in contemporary culture. Do you see a way that shame might play a healthy role in our lives? Be careful with your response! When is shame a useful and helpful feeling to have? When is it unhealthy?
3. Vs. 5 – I love this. The widow in the parable is so persistent, is raising her voice so loudly, that the judge says, “I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.” The verb translated here as “wear me out” has a slightly different meaning in the Greek. The verb is borrowed from boxing and means “hit under the eye” or (as English speakers would say it) “give me a black eye.” It is unlikely that she would have hit him – and she would have been in new trouble for doing so – but her loud pleas for justice are giving the judge a black eye. So, his mind is not changed because he fears God, and he has no use for this widow just because she is a human being. His only concern is himself. So, Jesus is saying (to his disciples and to us), if this woman’s plea is answered by an unjust judge, imagine how much more our prayers will be answered by a loving Father in heaven. However discouraged and hopeless you feel, Jesus says, your situation is not as bad as this poor widow’s.
4. So, let me list what I think are the truths in this parable:
  - Prayer conquers fear
  - Persistence in prayer is appropriate to piety (devotion to God)
  - In prayer the believer addresses a loving Father (not a capricious judge)
  - God is at work in history (see Jeremiah 31) and WILL accomplish his purposes and vindicate his elect
  - A woman is used as an example for the faithful to emulate! (Don’t underestimate how surprising this must have been!)

5. Vs. 8 "...when the Son of Man comes" – this parable starts out as a teaching about how to pray (and it is surely that as well), but the ending lets us know that Jesus is also speaking here about his return. So, why do we need to keep praying – and not lose hope? Well, so that the Son of Man will find faithful people when he returns. We can sometimes find the inner strength to pray for our illnesses and times of discouragement, but what about history itself? What about this feeling that the world is going from bad to worse, that wars and terrorism and evil have the upper hand? The real test of our faithfulness, Jesus seems to be saying, is if we can continue to pray in the face of all that is happening in the world. How do your prayers sound these days?