



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

February 24, 2013

"The Widow and the Judge" (Gospel of Luke Series)

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Jesus knows we like to pray. Jesus knows we like to pray especially when we are in trouble, when we are or someone we know is sick, when we need comfort, or when we want justice.

And when we are in those situations, and we pray and pray and pray and things don't go our way, we can lose heart. We can despair and think that we don't ever want to pray again.

But loving, thoughtful, and wise Jesus has a parable for people like us who might think or have thought it is time to give up praying. Maybe you are here today because you are on the brink of giving up on praying. But God brought you here this morning and says to you this morning, "Do not lose heart."

Listen to the words of Jesus found in our passage for today:

Luke 18:1 Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.

Luke 18:2 He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people.

Luke 18:3 In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.'

Luke 18:4 For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone,

Luke 18:5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'"

Luke 18:6 And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says.

Luke 18:7 And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them?

Luke 18:8 I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Luke 18:1-8

Keep your Bible open and let's go through this verse by verse. Verse One: Jesus gives the headline for this parable: "Pray always and do not lose heart." That alone should perk up anyone's ears. Tell me more, Lord; tell me more.

In the next two verses, Jesus describes the two main characters of the parable. One is a judge who is worldly. He doesn't give a rip about people, and he doesn't give a rip about God. And so in this corner the man with the black trunks and wearing black robes—is Judge Cold Heart! Then in

the other corner, we have not Judge Judy but Widow Judy!

Widows back in first-century Israel were often forgotten. They had little power, meager financial resources, little influence, and often overlooked. But God always loves the widows and He spoke up for them throughout the Old Testament. Widows were advocated by Old Testament prophets:

"Do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another." (Zechariah 7:10)

"For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever." (Jeremiah 7:5-7)

"Then I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts." (Malachi 3:5)

In the Psalms it says, “*The LORD watches over the strangers; He upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked He brings to ruin.*” (Psalm 146:9)

In Proverbs it says, “*The LORD tears down the house of the proud, but maintains the widow’s boundaries.*” (Proverbs 15:25)

So clearly, God is for the widow, especially for a widow who wants justice. We should also be for the widows in the church.

So in this corner, the defenseless widow who seeks justice. (Let’s hear it for the widow!) And in the other corner is the mean, cruel, ungodly judge who is a respecter of no one, not even the Almighty God himself. (Let’s hear a hiss and boo for the judge!)

The widow in the parable is apparently seeking justice for some issue, and so she continues to appeal to the judge over and over again to help her make things right, but the judge refuses time and time again. In essence, the judge says, “Beat it! Scram! Get away! You are a nuisance, a pest. The answer is no, a thousand times no, you wearisome widow!”

But no, the widow goes to him again and again saying, “I want justice. I want justice.”

Finally, the judge can’t take it any more! He has had it up to here! So in fluent Hebrew and Aramaic, the judge says the local phrase we know so well in Hawaii: “K den! ‘Nuff already!”

And the judge says, “Even though I don’t care about God, even though I don’t care about people, I will give this widow justice because I am tired already.”

This *wahine* wears me out. She keeps pressing on me, like a heavy piece of spam on a *musubi* smashed down on rice; or like the bread all around the *char siu* squashing it in a *manapua*. I’ve had it. I give up. I will give her what she wants.”

Having finished the parable, Jesus then gets excited and says, “Hey, guys, so get this about God: If this jerk of a judge, who really doesn’t care about people or about God, decides to grant justice to a helpless widow who keeps on asking him, do you think God, who is NOT evil, would turn a deaf ear to your prayer requests no matter how many times you bring them up?”

No, God is not like that! So keep praying. Keep bringing up your issues to God, and don’t give up.

Now to be sure—and we have talked about this before—God doesn’t necessarily give us what we want, when we want it, or how we want it. We talked about the Jerry Coffee phenomenon several weeks ago wherein not getting what we want can actually be a blessing. (If you missed my Christmas Eve sermon, you can listen to it online for a greater explanation.)

God has the perspective from the 30,000 feet level, so He will respond to all prayers in ways He thinks is best, and He will always act with justice. So if there is something on your heart—a grief you want lifted, an injustice you want addressed, a sickness you want healed from—don’t give up. Keep praying. Tell God your concerns.

Alice Yoder is a 90-year-old member of our church. She just got back from a mission trip to Kenya where she goes every year to help out in a hospital for people in need and ensure that they have wells

from where they can get clean water.

Alice said that when she got to her stopover in Zurich, Switzerland, she discovered that the airline did not have her three luggage on the same plane on which she flew. Terrible, right? But Alice said no. It was actually good because with her heavy luggage arriving late, she didn’t have to carry them. The airline delivered them straight to her hotel in Kenya.

When she got to Kenya, she discovered that she had brought her credit card instead of her debit card, and so she didn’t have cash with her. But it worked out okay because members Jim and Pam Becker, who now live in Michigan, met Alice in Kenya to join her on the mission trip. They would then be able to give her some money to last her the entire time she was there.

Another thing was that Alice’s daughter, Dianne, arrived in Kenya to join her on the mission trip, but Alice didn’t want her to come because that meant there will be no room for her in the van they were going to use in Kenya. But it worked out because Dianne had extra money to give to her mom. Dianne is also a good negotiator so she was able to help Alice negotiate for a better price for the generator she wanted to buy for the hospital she was working with.

Be vulnerable with God, and let Him know your concerns. Be vulnerable with people and let them know, too, because they may have great advice or encouragement for you AND they can add their prayers for you, too!

Vulnerability is the key to humility, which is the key to real mental and spiritual health.

Only when we are courageous to be transparent before others with our needs and hurts can we really get the help we need and be creative in finding solutions for these issues in our lives, business, homes, or social life.

Being open with others is the gateway to finding hope. Being honest about our ideas not working out or about not having the strength we need is the pathway to learning and getting the help we so desperately need.

We had more than 100 people come to our Healing Service last week. They were vulnerable to God and with other people who prayed for them. Those are people who don't give up. Some were first-timers, others have come before. They don't give up for they know that if an ungodly judge can help a widow, then surely a loving God will hear their prayers.

But the parable is not over. There is this one line at the end that we dare not miss. We'll start at verse 7 and then run into the last line in 8.

"And will not God grant justice to His chosen ones who cry to Him day and night? Will He delay long in helping them? I tell you, He will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:7-8)

That's the killer question. "AND YET, when the Son of Man (which is Jesus' favorite term for Himself because I think it shows He's one of us even though He's fully divine) comes, will He find faith on earth?"

What kind of faith is Jesus talking about? There are two

aspects of faith that the Son of Man, Jesus, is looking for.

- Constant Communication
- Constant Trust

First, Jesus wants us to have the kind of faith that, like the widow's, results in constant conversation with God through prayer. The widow was always talking to the judge even to the point that the judge would get weary. God will never get weary in hearing our prayers.

Like the drama we had today, the man was conversing with God. He was sharing with God his frustrations or confusion. We humans are so messed up. We are not strong enough or smart enough to save ourselves. We need to be in constant conversation with God for guidance and direction.

John 14:6 says: *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

Imagine this: You were a stranger in a town and you asked a guy on the street how to get to a certain place. The guy said, "Well, you go down ten blocks and take a right, then go ten more blocks and take a right, and then three blocks go left, then two blocks go right. When you come to a fork on the road, go 317 yards. When you come to a field, go another 200 yards and take a left at the river. Look for an old bridge and cross it, and then go left in the forest looking for the tree with yellow leaves and there you will find a road nearby and follow that for a mile and then take a left and then you might find where you are looking for."

You would be so confused after hearing that!

But what if the man on the street said, "Follow me, and I will take you there."

In essence, Jesus is our guide, and more than that He is saying, "I am the way, and the truth and the life, so follow Me. Talk to Me. Pray to Me."

Lots of people, men especially, don't know how to talk about their feelings. But in prayer, it is helpful to talk, to articulate our desires and requests with words. That is how the Jews and the ancient Christians did it. The Jews at that time even got so loud that Jesus had to say, "Go into your prayer closet at times to pray."

Notice how, in our drama, prayer was a process. As the man talked to God, he realized there were things he had to do that had not initially come to his mind—like forgive someone. As we talk to God all the time, we find that prayer changes us. It changes our attitude. It reduces our pessimism. It gives us God's wisdom and thoughts.

We change. We realize what we need to do rather than just sit on our butt hoping that God will do all of the work. There may be discoveries of our pride, our self-centeredness, or our selfishness. So talk to God all the time as you drive, jog, walk the dog, before you sleep, and when you wake up.

The second aspect of faith that God wants is a faith of constant trust even in the midst of our doubts, anger, or frustration. It's the kind of faith that no matter what happens, you will not give up on God. You will keep on praying no matter how long the suffering is. You won't throw in the towel on the Lord.

At our healing service last Sunday, one of the people who came was LaVerne Kleinert who is battling cancer. I have her permission to share this story. She said that God clearly led her to this church.

First, her vet, Dr. Scott Harada, suggested to her last year that she should come for the Easter Service. Then five months later, her surgeon, Dr. Andy Oishi, suggested that she come to a healing service at our church. She said what are the chances of a person being invited by two doctors—one a vet and the other a surgeon—to the same church! She said there must be something to this church!

Since attending the August 26 healing service last year, she has been a regular attendee. She later on signed up for the Alpha Course and became a member of First Prez. But her cancer has been hard on her. She has been part of our Facing Cancer with Hope support group that meets at 11 am here at church.

Gary Toh and I went to visit her in a care home a few weeks ago, so we were amazed to see her at last week's last Healing Service. It meant she was getting stronger.

But what I want to share is what LaVerne told us when we visited her. There she was, battling cancer, weak, tired from the chemo, and she told us, "If I get healed, I will praise God. If I don't get healed, I will still praise God."

That's the kind of faith Jesus wants to find here on earth. If LaVerne is miraculously healed, praise the Lord. But she knows that even if she dies, God is with her, and that would be God's best for her at that point.

"If I get healed, I will praise God. If I don't get healed, I will still praise God."

This is the kind of faith that Jesus hopes to find on earth: "I will follow you Lord, no matter what for you have the 30,000-foot perspective. You know what is best for me."

With God, we humans are like a kindergartner talking to Einstein. God knows so much more than we do, so we need to trust Him with our future.

You may be angry at God today, but as my wife says, better to be mad at God whom you believe exists, rather than to be angry and not believe in God.

God is always the key. God is the way, the truth, and the life. God can handle our anger, our impatience, even our doubts. How about us? Can we still trust God even to the point of death, enough to say, "if I get healed, I will praise God, and even if I don't get healed, I will still praise Him."

Let's pray.

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