

## **Persistent Justice**

*October 21, 2007*

(Pentecost 21 - Year C)

Luke 18: 1-8

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

I had not been at St. Alban's very long before I met a woman named Minnie.

Minnie is a woman who stops by the church quite often to ask me for money from my discretionary fund - for a variety of reasons.

Minnie calls into St. Alban's so often that Karen, our business manager here at the church, knows Minnie just from the sound of her voice on the telephone.

Even Scott, our new ministry coordinator, has also begun to recognize Minnie's voice when she calls in and asks to speak to me.

Minnie will always call in and ask:

"Is the Father in?"

And, if I am in a meeting, Karen or Scott will say:

"Minnie, I'm sorry, but Jeff is in a meeting, and he probably will not be available until after 11 o'clock."

Sure enough, at 11:05, Minnie is calling back to talk to me.

And she will talk and talk and talk to me - explaining her various needs and the needs of her family - until I will finally break down and give her a response.

She is extremely persistent in wanting me to help her.

Last October, I had helped Minnie out with some funds.

But I told her:

"Now Minnie, I am not going to give you any more money for the rest of this year.

So, for the remainder of 2006, I do not want you to call me any more."

She abided by my wishes.

And wouldn't you know it, but on January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2007,

Guess who was calling me that morning to ask for help?

It was Minnie.

Sometimes, I will help Minnie, just because she wears me out so.

Most of the time, however, I help out Minnie because she reminds me so much of the persistent widow that is in today's Gospel reading from Luke.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus tells a parable, a story, so that the people will keep praying, and not lose heart.

Jesus tells this story:

There was a nasty, old judge, who didn't like anybody or anything.

And, there was this poor widow, who kept coming to him, asking that the judge would grant her justice against her opponent.

The widow comes to see the judge and she calls him on the phone and she talks and talks and talks to him, trying to wear him down.

Finally, the mean old judge says:

"Fine.

I will grant this widow justice, so that she will not keep wearing me out by bothering me all the time."

Many people will say that this parable is all about persistent prayer.

But if you look carefully at this Gospel passage, the word "pray" is only mentioned once.

Yet the word "justice" appears in this short story a total of 4 times.

This story that Jesus tells is not just about persistent prayer.

The story is about persistent justice.

When Minnie comes to see me, she is not just looking for me to pray for her (although I certainly have prayed with and for her).

Minnie comes to St. Alban's Episcopal Church because she is looking for justice, because she has been given the short end of the stick in life.

And both Minnie and the widow in Jesus' parable are persistent.

They talk your arm off, they bother, they persuade, they wear you down, until they receive the justice they are looking for.

In the Gospel story, it says that the judge grants the widow justice, “so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.”

That phrase, “wear me out,” in the original Greek language, literally means, “give me a black eye.”

So, what the judge is really saying is that he grants justice to the widow because he is afraid that she will give him a black eye if he doesn’t listen to her.

And the crazy, upside down, wacky thing is:

That Jesus condones this sort of behavior.

The widow is so persistent, so annoying, so bothersome, so angry, that she is about to give the judge a black eye, by leaping across the courtroom and serving him a knuckle sandwich.

And Jesus thinks this kind of anger is ok.

For this is the kind of anger that is called “righteous anger.”

This is the kind of anger we feel when we see injustice in our society.

The kind of anger that I feel when I see an offensive joke circulating around via e-mail.

The kind of anger that Martin Luther King, Jr. felt when he saw little white girls and little black boys in separate schools.

This is the kind of anger that the poor widow in Jesus’ story felt when she could not receive justice - until she was ready to punch the guy’s lights out.

For righteous anger leads us into action.

Righteous anger leads us to reply to the offensive e-mailed joke, telling the sender that you do not appreciate such “humor.”

Righteous anger leads us to march for human rights in Selma, Alabama and in Waco, Texas.

Righteous anger leads us to be persistent, annoying, bothersome, until justice is finally, finally, granted.

What injustice in this world has gotten under your skin?

If you can’t think of anything, then let me share some of the things that

provoke righteous anger in me:

- \* The average compensation for a CEO in this country is \$10.7 million a year, while the minimum wage is \$5.85 per hour.
- \* 20% of children in Texas do not have health insurance.
- \* Approximately 225,000 Central Texans are functionally illiterate.
- \* More than 70,000 people have died in the last 2 years, due to conflict in Darfur, in the Sudan, but nobody knows for sure how many people have died - because nobody seems to care enough to find out.

If you still can't think of any injustice in this world to get angry about, come see me in my office and we'll think of something, I am sure.

Because the Church, my friends, is not a prim and proper place.

The Church is a place for the persistent, annoying, bothersome people, filled with righteous anger, who will call and write and march and petition and vote and donate and work and give, until justice is granted.

Because the Cross of Jesus Christ is not a prim and proper place, either.

For Jesus displayed righteous anger in his most holy life:

Anger at the empty rituals of the Pharisees,

Anger at the moneychangers who turned his Father's house into a den of robbers,

Anger at his friend Peter for setting his mind on human things,

Anger at the brood of vipers who cared more about religion than they did about people.

And Jesus's righteous anger led to action, as he stretched out his arms on the Cross in order

To turn the world upside down,

To scatter the proud in their conceit,

To fill the hungry with good things,

To cast down the mighty from their thrones,

To lift up the lowly.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Luke 1:46-55 (The Song of Mary)

Jesus stretched out his arms on the cross in order to grant people like Minnie and the poor widow - their long-awaited justice.

And, we are called to continue Jesus' work of justice, to pick up that cross, and to perform acts of justice and mercy in our own world.

However, the question is this:

Can you be persistent enough, annoying enough, bothersome enough and angry enough, until justice is finally granted?

Something tells me:

That we are just the right people for the job.

AMEN.

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