



Sermon preached by Revd Lythan Nevard, 19th October 2025

Readings: *Luke 18: 1-8 and Jeremiah 31: 27-34*

Pentecost 19

Let's talk a bit more about the widow and the judge and then see what our Old Testament reading says that might help in our reflection and our daily living.

There are a few things to understand about parables.

1: they are not supposed to be easy to understand. Even the short ones! And that is made harder for us because we don't have all the same social cues as the original audience. For example, they would know that for a woman to represent herself, things are bad.

2: As I reminded us earlier, it's not always the case that the most important person in the story is representing God. At the time a judge was not necessarily all about justice and fairness - They interpreted the law in ways that would protect the system

SO - what is going on here?

You know how it says, "I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming?" The Greek is more like "*...so she will not give me a black eye by her continual coming!*" What's happening is that week after week, in the public gates of the city the widow is making her plea to the judge, and people are watching. Week after week they are seeing him deny justice. He is getting a bad reputation; he is getting "a black eye" from this woman. And eventually he gives in. Not because he has been persuaded – because he hasn't – but just to shut her up. He is a very amoral person – doesn't care about God or respect people. And Jesus says – so if this judge who doesn't care eventually gives justice to the widow, how much more will God who does care, "judge in favour of his people and do it quickly"

To my mind it is another version of this. Would any of you who are fathers give your son a stone when he asks for bread? Or would you give him a snake when he asks for a fish? As bad as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more, then, will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! (Matthew 7) It is not "And so the judge learned his lesson", because I expect that he would have gone on to be equally as uncaring for the next hard case that came his way. So what does that tell us?

The bad news is that doing the right thing, and imagining that we will fix the world's problems is going to let us down. We may do good. But it will lead us to compassion fatigue and despair if we think we will solve the problems of the world. "The poor will always be with you," was not a throwaway line by Jesus. It's the truth. There will always be injustice. This is the paradox: do it because it is right, not to make things better. If we do things right because we think that should solve the fear of evil for us, we miss the point. It is only God who can solve things, only God who can bring us grace – as Jacob found out

The good news is that we should not be discouraged or lose heart as we live out this paradoxical Christian reality. We should, rather, look to the example of a woman who did not lose heart. Her persistence evoked a response even from an unrighteous judge. I think Jesus is saying, "Be like the widow." Keep on looking for justice. Keep on doing the right thing *for its own sake*. Keep on living right, EVEN though you know justice will not be done.... (everyone listening to Jesus knew the judge was not interested in justice). Keep on being like the widow. To live like this is to *live in faith*. To live like this is to *live righteously*; it is doing what is right for no other reason than it is right. It is to do right even though it costs, and even though it may not succeed in gaining justice. This is the paradox: do it because it is right, not to make things better.

When that feels like really hard work, when it feels like the whole world is against us, we can draw comfort from the covenant promises in the Bible – like the one in Jeremiah.

Jeremiah talks about a time when things will be different. At the moment it is more that the sins of the fathers are meted out on the children. He uses that really descriptive image of the parent eating sour grapes and the child going eeerk!

That is kids punished for what parents did – can you imagine?

(although with global warming going mostly unchecked this is all too real in my opinion)

What Jeremiah is doing here is making promises that God's love is different:

Laying it out in a systematic way so they can remember - five facts in total.

Fact One: The day will come when animals and people will increase in number in Israel.

Fact Two: Although Israel was once destroyed in the past it will one day be made new.

Fact Three: People are responsible for their own actions.

Fact Four: God will give us instructions in our hearts to live by.

Fact Five: People will know God because they will see us doing the things God wants us to do.

A covenant is a promise – like on money “I promise to pay the bearer....”.

The Old Testament has many covenants – and in order that they come they show God getting closer and closer to us.

The rainbow with its covenant promise is way up in the sky.

The Ten Commandments are rules written on stone tablets kept in the holy of Holies in the Temple.

But Jeremiah says that one day God will write a covenant on our hearts.

It's up close and personal love.

Of course we have Jesus who shows us that love even more up close and personal...

God come as one of us, telling stories to help us live the right way. And in the end dying on a cross for us. Rising again – beating sin and death for us. Sending the Spirit as an ever present reminder of God's covenant love. God persists in love for us no matter what.

Reminder of the five facts - what do they have to do with us?

1-2 in the dark times, have hope

3 live the life Jesus has called you to live

4 we have the Holy Spirit – the instructions in our hearts to live by

5 and we are called to be persistent in loving others as God persists in loving us. Which brings us back to that story of the widow and the judge. Look at how God has never given up on us. So we should persist on prayer and loving others, no matter what.

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