

TFTD 2025.26 Thursday April 3rd

The Unjust Judge: Luke 18:1-8



In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God, nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, "Grant me justice against my adversary."

On Saturday we were considering in this series of reflections the strange parable of the crafty manager who was about to be sacked by his master for failing to do his job in a sufficiently ruthless way. He accepts his fate and goes down fighting by cutting some very good deals for the tenants. The master seems to see the clever side of this and the tenants would certainly approve. Shrewdness creates a different reality and just maybe the manager retained his job!

Loveday reminded us then that a parable is basically a story which starts with something in the ordinary world to which the listeners of Jesus would relate. Everyone would know about ruthless masters and dubious judges. Jesus builds on these everyday experiences to show us something about what God or God's Kingdom is like.

Looking ahead to today's parable Loveday reminded us that sometimes Jesus uses shock tactics to help us in this process. The point of today's passage is that even an unjust judge will listen if you shout loud enough. How much more will God listen to those who cry out to him. The more puzzling a parable seems to be, the more it draws us in to wrestle with it and to work it out for ourselves and so change the way we see the world.

Parents have different techniques for their crying babies. At the first sign of noise some parents rush in to bring comfort. Others have a firmer approach and hold off for a while hoping the baby will settle. Sometimes babies will cry themselves to sleep. Maybe that's a good and natural thing. Maybe sometimes it means the baby has lost hope that anyone will ever come. The dilemmas of parenthood and indeed babyhood!

In today's parable we meet a widow with a genuine grievance - too alone it seems to send a man to represent her as would have been more common and too poor to pay the bribe required by many judges. She is powerless. Or so it seems. At the bottom of the social heap with nothing going for her. We could understand if she were to give up. But this woman is both determined and bold. She will not sit quietly and let injustice take its normal course. She speaks up again and again and will not let things rest.

The purpose of the parable is not to let anyone settle for the unfair ways of the world which we encounter so often. But I wonder if it is in fact more positively to encourage us to press into God's true nature. The God who seeks ways persistently to bring justice would be touched by this woman's persistent cry. Her refusal to accept injustice and her passion for the poor and vulnerable echo God's own heart.

This is the God who hears the cry of his people in slavery in Egypt and leads them out to freedom. This is the Jesus who in Matthew 7:7 we hear exhorting us to "ask and it will be given you. Search and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened for you."

This can be our inspiration too. We are to persist because we know when we pray in tune with God that our cries align with who God is. Ultimately those cries are joined by God's own cry and justice will be done.

We live in a world of increasing lack of faith in systems that are meant to protect the poorest and most vulnerable. In many countries the justice system is corrupt and bends entirely to the will of the governing elite.

I recently read Alexei Navalny's unbearably moving book "Patriot". Navalny stood up to the corruption of Vladimir Putin over many years and

paid for this with his life. The judicial system was used to break him down and ultimately to silence him forever. In one of the trials which Navalny endured he spoke personally to the judge whose job it was to rubber stamp the will of the government. Navalny implored the judge to remember the basic principles of justice which he was meant to uphold. Of course he was ignored. But his point was made. And his persistence which never saw justice for himself has inspired countless others to take up the baton. Navalny died convinced that one day justice will prevail and that his country will be free. And his journey led him to a deep Christian faith in which his sense of hope and justice burned bright to the end.

God of justice,
Renew our faith in you
And our commitment to your kingdom.
Your just rule,
where widows are heard and comforted,
The oppressed set free, the poor given hope.
Confront the injustice of our times
And give us courage to voice your outrage.

Do not delay in helping us.
Do not let hope die.
Do not keep your Spirit from us.
This we pray in the name of the one who brings true justice,
Our crucified and risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

Amen

Nick Thompson