

Somewhere, someone needs help.

October 16, 2022, Psalm 119: 97-104. Luke 18: 1-8

I love how Jesus' parables hold the heart of his message. He tells parables more than any other kind of story so that his message will get inside us, puzzle and make us uncomfortable, and sometimes, if we are open, transform us.

The Jesus that I follow wants to help us to not lose heart. He also wants to help us grow a bigger heart and mind. To re-connect us with the Big Heart that shatters all the time and when put back together can help heal the world.

Sometimes parables make us laugh or cry or shout. We cry when we imagine the many injustices that this widow has experienced; turned away time and time again by the unjust justice system. We laugh at the childish behavior of the judge. "Because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice so that she may not wear me out by continually coming!" We shout joyfully with her when the unjust judge does finally wear out.

Jesus sets this parable in a courtroom where widows need to plead their own case and judges are dismissive. He did this to demonstrate to us that justice cannot be taken for granted. Even when, as the Prophet Micah said "What does the Lord require of you? "To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

One preacher said this about today's parable. "I vividly remember pretending this text with my Church School classes when I was a children's priest. We played the story over and over, so everyone got to be the judge, the widow, the guards keeping the widow from the judge, the obsequious attendants, and other folk waiting their turn for justice. One ingenious fifth grade boy chose a Harpo Marx wig from the costume rack and played the widow as if she were mad. This rendering was the most memorable because it was the most absurd and funny. But we all internalized the story that day. Maybe the persistence asked from us requires not only retrospection but introspection. Looking again. Opening to the moment more deeply. Listening more profoundly. Perceiving the holy behind the ordinary. The Sacred within the mundane....Perhaps you have to be a little mad not only to pray but to pray and not lose heart." (*Rev Suzanne Guthrie.*)

It is easy to lose heart, but we might think that this would never happen to us. We would be like the widow, always calling out to God and humanity. Indeed we are often that persistent and full of heart and deeply faithful.

But just when we find ourselves getting a bit self-satisfied Jesus wraps up the parable by pointedly saying "And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

This is where the parable turns on its head by asking us to consider our faith and our actions. Remember that Jesus told this parable about our need to, not our success in, praying and stretching our hearts to be bearers of justice. Maybe we should not be smug about where we think we are in this story. Maybe we are not the widow.

We are standing here today in need of prayer just as in some strange way the unjust judge needed prayer as well as a good hollering at when he was faced with the widow.

This year I am especially grateful for the actions and the prayers of our community. Every Sunday you move my heart and my mind as I hear you ask for prayer for those you love and for those all around the world who, like the widow in the story are dealing with unjust systems or overwhelming suffering.

As an Open and Affirming Congregation we look to each other to stand on the side of love with our LGBTQI brothers and sisters. And we look to each other to stand on the side of love with the hungry and the grieving. Those in need of clothing. Those who wonder if we believe they are good enough for God and for our church.

We pray constantly for our own sisters, brothers, children, mothers, and fathers. And for people we do not know, and yet are someone else's sister, brother, mother, or father. We do this to grow our hearts and help mend the world. To be as merciful as God is merciful.

This week I received a poem by the singer/songwriter Carrie Newcomer. I want to end my words here with that poem. It reminds me that every day someone, somewhere, is knocking on our door. They are not losing heart. They are asking us to send and to be love.

Somewhere someone needs help.
Send love. It matters.

If you can't get there yourself,
then take a deep breath.
Breathe in the weight of their troubles.
Breathe out and send all those burdens
into the Light
where sorrows can be held
with the most tender and infinite grace.

Breathe in what you can do.
Breathe out what you can't change.
Spool out a thread of connection,
send courage and calm.
For the nights can be long
and filled with shadows,
and sometimes terrible
unexpected waters will rise.

Somewhere someone needs help.
Send love. It matters.

We need to pray together, and we need as we will soon hear, to dunk down into the river of grace. When we lose heart and stop praying, this grace will keep flowing no matter what. When we are found, or we find someone else in need, we can and should risk looking foolish by shouting "O Lord here we go letting go!" " Amen

