

19th Sunday after Pentecost
St. George Lutheran Church, Brighton, MI
“God Hears and Acts”
Luke 18:1-8
October 19, 2025

This past week brought a glimmer of good news to a part of the world that has been ravaged by war. A ceasefire between Israel and Hamas went into effect a week ago Friday, and earlier this week, all of the living Israeli hostages and hundreds of Palestinian prisoners returned home. It has been a long wait for family members to see their loved ones. It has also been a long wait for those who have endured two years of warfare.

This doesn't mean that everything is suddenly fine in that part of the world. The events of the past week and a half are only the beginning of what is needed for people who are suffering terribly. And that assumes that the ceasefire holds. Thousands of innocent people have had their lives shattered over the past two years. Hospitals are destroyed. Homes are wiped out. Food, clean water, and medicine are scarce. The victims of war cry out. But will their cries be heard? And when will justice be granted?

In our gospel for today we hear about a widow who is crying out. According to Luke, Jesus is telling a parable about the need to pray always and not lose heart. Except that there might be more to this parable.

We first hear about a judge. This judge did not fear God. Nor did he have any respect for people. Next we hear about a widow who kept coming to this

judge, seeking justice against her accuser. We don't know anything about her case – who is accusing her and why. We do know that as a widow, she would have been particularly vulnerable. But at the same time, this didn't mean that she would have been a pushover.

And the widow in this story is certainly not a pushover. Because even though the judge refuses to grant her justice, she keeps coming back. Again and again and again. Until the judge finally can't take it anymore and decides to grant her justice. The reason? The text reads so that she may not wear him out by continually coming. But believe it or not, the Greek literally reads so that she may not come and strike him under the eye. So whether it is by her persistence, or her threat to punch him in the eye, it sounds as if the widow successfully wears down this judge.

Now I don't know about you, but I'm not completely sure what to think about this parable, at least at first glance. If this parable is truly about the need to pray always, does it mean that our prayers are only answered if we wear God down? I mean, there are examples in Scripture where God is prepared to do one thing but after hearing the pleas of God's people, goes in a different direction. But I'm not sure how I feel about a God who answers prayer after getting worn down.

Except that Jesus never asked us to think of God like the unjust judge. He only said to listen to what the unjust judge says. And then he asks, "Will not God

grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night?” So while this sounds a bit like the unjust judge – granting justice after hearing cries day and night – we discover that the similarities end there. Because then Jesus asks, “Will he delay long in helping them?” And then he adds, “I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them.” Which leaves us with an image of God who, unlike the unjust judge, will not wait to be worn down before granting justice.

Except, I don’t know about you, this still leaves me struggling. Because justice doesn’t always come quickly. Justice, at times, seems delayed. Returning to the Gaza Strip, for two years, thousands of innocent Palestinians have suffered, and there is a long road ahead, again assuming that a ceasefire holds. In our own nation, things like voting rights for women and later minorities took time to achieve. The Civil Rights movement wasn’t a short-lived movement. It took time. And even then, injustice remained, and some would argue still remains, many years after significant gains were made. While immigration is a controversial topic, an increasing number of people are concerned that innocent law-abiding U.S. citizens have been detained, sometimes violently, by immigration agents. And these are just a few examples of the ways in which justice, at times, seems delayed.

What then are we to do with this parable? We have a widow who is persistent in her cries for justice. We have an unjust judge who seems to only care

about himself. And we have the promise that God will quickly grant justice to those who cry out to him, while reality suggests that justice does not always come quickly.

Now we could try to explain this away by saying God's time is not the same as our time. Which is certainly true. God's perspective of quickness is likely quite different than our own.

But I wonder if there is something else going on here. Because there is clearly a contrast between God and the judge. And I wonder if the contrast is a reminder that we human beings don't always get things right. I wonder if we are at times like the unjust judge. How often do we resist the cause of justice? How often do we put ourselves in the place of a judge, deciding who deserves something or not? How often do we ignore the needs of those who face injustice? How often do we cling to our own comfort or even privilege? At times we may resist, delay, or even refuse the cause of justice for those who cry out for it. We may be more like the unjust judge than we want to admit.

But God is *not* like the unjust judge. God not only hears the cries of those seeking justice. God will also act. The hard part is it sometimes takes a while. And I wonder if that has more to do with us than it has to do with God. Because while we believe that God is all powerful – after all, God can raise the dead back to life – God has also given us free will. We make choices that affect how quickly

justice is given. And so I wonder if the parable of the unjust judge is a reminder to us that we can get in the way of the justice that God wants for those who cry out.

And yet, as surely as we are sometimes the ones standing in the way, we can also be the ones who are crying out for justice, either for ourselves or for others. It is, after all, one of the promises made in baptism and confirmation: to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

When we are the ones working for justice and peace, we might get discouraged. We try to persist like the widow in today's parable. But at some point, we may get worn down by those who refuse to listen or those who stand in the way.

But God is not an unjust judge. God hears the cries of those who cry out for justice, and God will act, in spite of those unjust judges who might stand in the way.

Because God has already overcome the power of everything that takes life from us. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has overcome the power of sin and death. And it's because of what Jesus has done for us that we can put our hope in the promise of the parable. We can put our hope and trust in God who has the power to grant justice through all the earth.

It still doesn't solve the problem of timing. It still doesn't answer the question of "why does it take so long?" It does assure us that our God is persistent. God hears our cries. And one day God will bring about justice for all who cry out.

In the meantime, we cry out. We pray. And we put our hope and trust in the one whose love for us never wavers or wears out. With the Psalmist, as we heard this morning we ask, "I lift up my eyes to the hills; from where is my help to come?" And with the Psalmist we can also say with confidence, "My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth."

Sometimes we catch glimpses of God's justice – a ceasefire, release of hostages or prisoners of war, relief to those suffering – that can give us hope when all around us seems hopeless. Which might be just enough to help us keep on praying, hoping, and trusting that one day God will make all things right.

Amen.