

Welcome, Announcements, and Land Acknowledgement

*We recognize that the land where we gather for worship belongs to God, as does all of creation, and that the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – have lived on this land since before settlers of European descent claimed ownership and displaced those for whom it was home. As we pursue our goals to dismantle racism and attend to growing diversity, we lament this injustice in our history and commit ourselves to just and respectful relationships within our congregation and our neighborhood*

➤ *O let the power fall on me*

Call to Worship

God promises us justice,

**and teaches us persistence.**

God promises us compassion,

**and teaches us not to lose heart.**

God promises to be with us

**and teaches us to tend to each other.**

So let us worship our God of comfort and challenge,

**We will offer prayers and praise to our God of hope and healing.**

Gathering Prayer / The Lord's Prayer / Words of Hope

Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit, you breathe life into all things and nourish your whole creation. You are a rock and refuge for your people, for you are trustworthy in all things. Your desire for peace with justice can never be defeated. You alone can bring life out of death, and restore wholeness to broken lives, so we praise you and rejoice in the hope you offer. For your love is the power at work in every situation, seeking goodness and revealing truth, a love that will never let us go. In our time of worship, we offer you our love and loyalty through Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

God of our hopes and our hearts, you provide the gift of faith but we lose heart quickly. Troubles weaken our trust and disappointments eat away at our commitment. Forgive us and create in us clean hearts and in your love, give us peace and perseverance. We pray together as Jesus encouraged us to do... **Our Father, who art in heaven – hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come – thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen**

What will separate us from the love of Christ? Hardship? Distress? Peril or sword? No, neither death nor life, nor things present nor things to come can separate us from the love of God in

Christ Jesus. Let us rejoice that, no matter what is happening around us, no matter what we have done, God's deep love will never let us go. Thanks be to God.

➤ *O day of peace that dimly shines*

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† Prayer for Understanding

**Inspiring God, by your Spirit, open our minds and hearts to receive your Word for today, whether it challenges or comforts us, so that we may live more faithfully as we follow Jesus Christ, your Living Word. Amen**

Scripture

**Jeremiah 31:27-34** [OT 735]

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of humans and the seed of animals. And just as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the LORD. In those days they shall no longer say: 'The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge.

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the LORD', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

**Luke 18: 1-8** [NT 81]

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, 'In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, "Grant me justice against my opponent." For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, "Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" And the Lord said, 'Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?'

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

## Message

“Well behaved women rarely make history” and nowhere is this truer than in our Holy scriptures.

Women like Ruth, Deborah, Sarah, Mary Magdalene, the woman at the well, the women at the tomb and the central figure of our parable today are only a few of the examples of misbehaving women making history through scripture. I mean the fact that we are talking about them thousands of years later tells us they have firmly planted themselves into Gods story! In fact, any woman who is named in the Bible is there because she is important, we are told to pay attention to what she has to teach us.

So, I wonder, what our main character, a middle eastern, nameless, faceless widow from the 1<sup>st</sup> century, can teach us today?

Before we get to her (I promise she is the main character of my sermon!) we need to look at the first character introduced in this parable, the judge.

From the start Jesus makes it clear that this judge is bad news, he “neither fears God nor respects human beings” This judge has no shame. Like most judges of his day, he was not there to serve justice. He was there to take bribes from the rich and powerful and then rule in their favour. Impartial justice was not even on his radar! He had abandoned all the pretense and was openly a judge of injustice.

After hearing about this horrible Judge Jesus introduces his listeners to a new character, who he calls “the widow.” By giving her the title widow we know that God hears her cries, she is the character in this story that we are supposed to care about. In sharp contrast to the powerful judge, she is a symbol of helplessness.

Though we do not know all the details, based solely on the reality that she is alone in court we can surmise that her husband has died. If she brought any money into the marriage, she would be in court fighting to claim her money back. As a woman she would have been extremely vulnerable, and her opponents would have been numerous. Anyone of her male relatives including her sons would want to keep that money and would do anything in their power to make sure it was not returned to her. You can hear the desperation in her voice as she says “Grant me justice against my opponent.’ This court case was life-or-death for this woman.

Despite all that is against her, she does not stay quiet. She goes public in the most embarrassing way; her voice cries out for justice against this corrupt system. She speaks the truth about the laws and blows the cover of those who co-opt it and corrupt it to serve their greed. She does not criticize the judge but instead calls him to justice, to do the right thing, to be accountable. This widow has nothing on her side except what is right and uses it to fight for truth!

Even the judge cannot stand up against her, the Greek word used in their interaction is a boxing term which describes continual blows that eventually give one a black eye. Her persistence is working! She is starting to raise some eyebrows, people in the court are asking questions, is this Judge following the laws? Is he taking bribes? Is he doing what is just? Under the pressure, the judge decides to move on, all this isn't worth the trouble, and he knows there will be a less troublesome case to come.

This widow is not to be forgotten.

So, I wonder again, what can our main character, a middle eastern, nameless, faceless widow from the 1<sup>st</sup> century, teach us today?

A wise scholar who I much admire gives one suggestion. He writes:

“When anyone steps out of the system and tells the truth, lives the truth, that enables everyone else to peer behind the curtain too. Anyone who steps out of line therefore *denies it in principle and threatens it in its entirety*...if the main pillar of the system is living a lie, then it is not surprising that the fundamental threat to it is living the truth.”

On September 13<sup>th</sup> Mahsa Amini was arrested by the morality police in Tehran the capital of Iran. She was beaten by police, taken to a detention center and died in hospital. The reason for her death? Her headscarf was not placed on her head correctly, she was living outside the societal norms expected of her. She like our nameless widow was vulnerable, God heard her cries and yet evil persisted.

When we hear of situations like this it is hard have faith and yet Jesus tells us not to lose heart and to keep praying. He tells a story with the most unlikely of heroes at its center to remind us of this new Kingdom of God that is here on earth. The widow embodies Jesus new vision for a world where “victims will claim their rights and seek justice often in an unsettling manner.”

God is calling us to remember that he is love that he is on the side of his people, that we are not forgotten. God is the opposite of the judge God is justice. He calls us to be people of faith, to pray despite all odds because he knows that the Truth will set us free.

Like the cries of our widow, we have heard the cries of people all over the world, shouting the name of Mahsa Amini and this has not come without a price as protestors are beaten and killed on the streets. They are telling and living the truth bringing to light a corrupt and unjust system that keeps women silent. This is a life-or-death situation and with desperation people are turning to God and asking where is this quick justice that you promised us? And Jesus responds with an equally challenging question. He asks, “when I return, will I find faith on earth?”

Like so many parables that Jesus tells there is not an easy answer to either of these questions and instead it is left up to us.

What I do know for certain is that justice is the character of God, and it will come true. It may come true in stages, in ways that are not at once obvious, but where we bring the love of God justice will be.

I leave you with this poem from Jan Richardson:

***Blessed are you***  
who bear the light  
in unbearable times,  
who testify  
to its endurance  
amid the unendurable,  
who bear witness  
to its persistence  
when everything seems  
in shadow  
and grief.  
***Blessed are you***  
in whom

➤ *Oh for a world where everyone*

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† Offering Invitation

Like the widow at the judge's bench, God persists in asking for our response to needs we might think are beyond us. Trust that God will bless what we offer and do surprising things with us, for us and through us, through Christ, our Living Lord.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

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† Offering Prayer

**God of the great and the small, we bring what we have to share, the fruit of our lives. Bless our gifts and our lives so that generosity and justice will join hands to surprise the world with your goodness in Jesus' name. Amen**

† Pastoral Prayers

God of life, you open our eyes on the world you love and show us your presence and your purpose. We see the beauty and wonder throughout creation and feel the love and compassion you offer through friend and stranger. For all these gifts we give you thanks. We pray for those who cannot recognize these gifts in their lives. Open their eyes to your presence and our companionship so that they may know your steadfast love. God who listens, hear our prayer, **and in your mercy, answer.**

God of justice, you open our eyes on the world and its anxiety and show us struggle and conflict. We see the burdens many carry in these stressful times. Today we pray for those whose businesses are struggling; for producers unsure they will receive a fair return; for workers uncertain about their jobs prospect; and for families weighed down by rising costs. Open their eyes to new possibilities and open our eyes to ways we can support them. God who listens, hear our prayer, **and in your mercy, answer.**

God of compassion, you open our eyes on the world in pain and show us suffering and despair. We see all the challenges in health care and tired professionals stretched beyond their limits. Renew their strength of purpose. We pray for communities struggling with chronic hunger as well as the shifting reality of the pandemic, and for all who face difficult diagnoses, painful illness, or delays in treatment...

Open their eyes to your mercy and open our eyes to ways we can offer support. God who listens, hear our prayer, **and in your mercy, answer.**

God of wisdom, you open our eyes on the world out of balance and show us its many complexities. We see old animosities and fresh upheavals that put innocent lives at risk. We pray for the millions displaced by current conflicts and natural disasters, and pray that leaders in every country and community will attend to the suffering of their people with mercy and justice. Equip all those who prepare for ministry in our Colleges (The Presbyterian College (Montreal, Quebec), Knox College (Toronto, Ontario) and St. Andrew's Hall/Vancouver School of Theology (British Columbia) with the knowledge and commitment needed to serve in complicated times. Open all our eyes to creative solutions for situations which break your heart and ours. God who listens, hear our prayer, **and in your mercy, answer. Amen**

➤ *Seek ye first*

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### Blessing

And may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit, and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

➤ *May the God of hope go with us every day*

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