

After all these weeks in the Gospel of dishonest managers, and servants caught up in a preacher's relief to find a more simple parable starts: "Jesus told them a parable about the heart." Now that sounds manageable. We could then, couldn't we? I know in times when my weary, I sure could.

This parable comes right after a conversation with Pharisees about the kingdom of God. They say, "Because honestly, things didn't look much like the power, in imitation of the kingdom of God."

"In a certain city," Jesus says, "there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people." Well that's quite the introduction! This judge doesn't care about God, and he doesn't care about people. I.. wouldn't call him the role model for justice! And then, along comes a widow. Alone, powerless, with no one to speak for her, she keeps coming before this unjust judge, again and again: "Grant me justice against my opponent."

It's worth remembering that in the ancient world, widows were among the most vulnerable people in society. Over and over again, scripture warns us to care for them. "You shall not abuse any widow or orphan," says Exodus. "If they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry." In other words, we don't mess with widows.

But this particular widow—she doesn't sit around accept her fate. She shows up. Again and again, she speaks up. And finally, the judge—this man who doesn't care about God or people—gives in. Not because he's grown a heart like the Grinch, but because she's worn him down!

Now, if we stopped the story there, we could take away an easy lesson: if we just keep pestering God, we'll eventually get what we want. But that's not quite the lesson because that's not quite the God we serve. (we don't do Santa God) Jesus isn't saying that God is like the unjust judge or is the unjust judge. In

fact, he's saying the opposite. He's saying, if even a corrupt judge will grant justice just to get some peace and quiet, how much more will a loving, compassionate God listen to his people?

And then Jesus goes on: "Will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night?" And then he adds, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

So... what's this parable really about? Is it about prayer? Justice? Faith? (The answer is yes. All of the above.) Because Jesus doesn't separate them. Prayer, faith, and justice belong together. Theologian and Lutheran minister Barbara Lundblad says, if we pray without working for justice, our prayers are empty. If we work for justice without prayer, we will think it all depends on us. If we pray and work for justice without faith, we will fall into despair when justice isn't done (Barbara Lundblad, paraphrased via Eric Fistler)

So back to the widow--the one who kept showing up. The one who refused to be silent. She is our teacher of perseverance and faith. Her circumstances may be very different from ours, but her spirit is one we need today. Because sometimes we, too, look around and see a world that feels far from the holiness God intends. We see broken systems, endless conflict, and people in need of mercy and hope.

It's easy to lose heart when the world rewards those who neither fear God nor respect people. It's easy to stop praying when the answers don't seem to come. But that's exactly when Jesus says today: Don't give up. Keep praying. Keep believing. Keep doing the work of justice. The kingdom of God might be hard to see, but that doesn't mean it isn't here—growing quietly and taking root, often in places we'd least expect.

Friends, the widow's persistence is not just about nagging a reluctant God—it's about trusting that God's justice is worth pursuing. It's about believing that prayer changes us, even if our circumstances don't change. And it's about holding on to faith that the kingdom is coming, even when the world gives us every reason to doubt it.

So today, I pray that we might all have a bit of that widow's spirit—that we might pray without ceasing, that we might work for justice without fear, and that we keep our faith even when it's hard to see what God is doing.

Because the parable that starts so simply ends with a deeper question: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

May the answer, in each of us, be yes.

Amen.