

**Year C, Pentecost 22**

**October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013**

**Luke 18:1-18**

### **Will He Find Faith on Earth?**

This judge is the modern world's perfect individual, an example of a free and independent man who needs no one and has no fear. He is his own person. No one, neither God nor any human, can impact him. He makes decisions solely from within and cannot be bought nor influenced from any direction. Surely his judgments are pure as he strikes the balance that justice demand? On the other hand, maybe he is autistic or psychopathic—those names we give to people who seem to have little capacity to feel with another.

In the same city there lives a woman who also seems fearless and very persistent. The Judge can't stop her from coming but she is quite powerless. She just comes again and again always with the same request, "grant me justice against my opponent."

She can't play on the Judges sympathy because he doesn't have a sympathetic bone in his body. But she persists. Finally, thinking only of himself and his own needs, there being no other person in his world that matters to him, he enters into conversation with himself.

He says, "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." This judge has remarkable self-awareness. He has no morals, knows he has no morals and feels no shame about that. In what sense is he human? Yet he is tasked with adjudicating justice. Even Judge Judy has a heart. Is this guy from Pluto?

Now this whole story is supposed to address the disciples need to pray always and not to lose heart. So far I haven't gotten the connection. And why are the disciples in danger of losing heart anyway? Maybe Jesus is looking ahead and beginning to prepare them for what's going to happen in Jerusalem. They will be tempted to lose heart when Jesus is murdered and the murder will be committed by the heartless combination of the mob, the religious leaders and a foreign government—and it will all be very unjust.

Is Jesus saying in Jerusalem the disciples will feel powerless, like the woman whose plea for justice seems absolutely futile? But even when they feel that way, don't stop praying and don't lose heart—don't give up. They will feel this is senseless, heartless, and absolutely unjust and it is, but it is not beyond redeeming. Even the unjust one will relent when it is in his self-interest to do so.

Now I am going to introduce another strand of thought. In the furor of the coming event some will not get caught up in the murderous mob. Luke is clear that some women stood by and watched. They never lost sight of his innocence even when the disciples did. Maybe that's why

women were the first on the scene at his resurrection. Maybe that's why in Jesus' story it's a woman who prevails by persisting in her desire for justice.

In a telling hint Jesus asks his disciples to "listen to what the unjust judge says." He says, "Because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming." Does the judge in Jesus' story represent the mob that kills Jesus? Mobs are incredibly unjust and care about neither God nor humans. They are sociopathic, terribly cruel and have no conscience.

Do you remember the story "To Kill a Mockingbird." The threat came from the mob and the Gregory Peck's character had to defang this mob or an innocent black man would die. This is what Jesus is heading to Jerusalem to do. He's going to defang the unjust judge who in the story stands in for sinful humanity, always wanting to blame someone else for sin. And he will defang it in a way no one sees coming. He will allow himself to die at the mobs hands even as he exclaims, "Father forgive them for they don't know what they are doing." This is how he wears out the mob. He reveals the mechanism driving it. He shows how humans attempt to achieve an elusive unity by turning on the victim and destroying them. This is how he gives the unjust judge a black eye. He doesn't destroy the judge, no; he wears him out by revealing the source of his destructive power.

The finger-pointing mob is the unjust judge that Jesus will soon encounter in Jerusalem? And Jesus, represented by the woman, gets the better of the judge by unmasking the source of his power. From now on the more the unjust judge judges unjustly, the more he is revealed. In this way Jesus wears out the force for evil driving our world from the beginning.

Recently the news bit most capturing my attention and imagination has been the story of Malala, the now 16 year old girl from Pakistan who the Taliban tried to kill at age 14 because she was advocating for the education of girls in Taliban controlled parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan. As you may remember, she was shot point blank in the head but the bullet deflected away from her brain and she survived. She has become a poster child for freedom and has been a more powerful force for human dignity and human rights than all the armies combined in the wars in that part of the world. Women and girls all over the world have been encouraged, ennobled and galvanized in their desire to claim their right to education and oppose the Taliban and forces like them, who wish to maintain control over them. For women she is a virtual non-violent Chi Guava and there could not be a better person to model after for both women and men. To me she is a Muslim who shows us Jesus and seeing what she is doing brings tears to my eyes.

Two weeks ago she was on the Jon Stewart show. She came out and Jon stood up and said "I am so honored to have you on my show." She politely replied "I am honored to be here." "No," Jon replied, "I honor you. I know me and I honor you." It was a confessional moment as Jon Stewart acknowledged his own violence and her courage in continuing to be non-violent. Malala laughed, her face revealing the stroke-like sag caused by the bullet. Jon then said it gave him great joy to make her laugh. It was a beautifully human moment.

Then he asked her what she thought when she heard that the Taliban had her on their list of those to assassinate. She said at first she couldn't believe that they would kill a child, then she became afraid for her father, and then she thought that if they came she would throw a shoe at them. But then she realized that throwing the shoe would make her just like them. So she decided that she would tell them that she was for the education of girls, even their daughters, and having said they could do with her what they wanted.

Jon Steward's jaw dropped and he was speechless. Finally he said, "I know you love your father very much and he is back stage right now. But do you think it would be all right with him if I adopted you?"

That same day she had been to the United Nations and spoken on the Day of the Child. The next day she went to the White House and told President Obama about the heartache our drones were causing the people she loves. She said that since her attack she fears no one. She reminds me of the widow in Jesus' story. Do you see how her persistence is wearing out the unjust judges of this world?

Jesus said, "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 him." And he did! He came at the resurrection and some women were the first to see him. It was the lightening that lit up the sky, revealing what had been hidden and changing the world. He is the One who brings God's justice and pronounces it with his word of forgiveness. His justice judges all our desires for retribution.

Maybe we are all unjust judges who neither fear God nor have regard for humans and our judgment is based solely on self-interest. But if that is so, we too are forgiven.

Jesus has one more question. "And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Will we believe what he has shown us about ourselves and what he has shown us about God? And what he has shown us is quite earthy and very much in this world. It has everything to do with Pakistan and Iran, Israel and United States, Christians and Muslims and it is totally about the fate of our planet earth.

"Will he find faith on earth?"