

Botherings

(Preached @ Footscray Baptist Church by Cheryl Williams, October 16th, 2022 - Luke 18:1-8)

I can only imagine what had happened to this woman that has brought her to court pleading for justice. A widow, clearly, she has no husband, but maybe no children either, as she appears to have no one to stand up for her. Has she been ripped off by a landlord or in business? Has someone tried to take her land or advantage of her in some other way? She is not happy. Nor is she throwing a tantrum like a toddler might do to get their way.

Widows in Jesus' day were meant to be cared for by others. The Hebrew bible is full of instructions about how people were to treat them, about how they were meant to look after them – you've heard those instructions, give to the widows and poor, leave some of your crop on the edges of your land for the widows and poor. Remember Ruth and Naomi, Ruth gleaned food from the paddocks of Boaz.

Widows were on the edges of society and usually had no voice. However, this woman has found hers. Something has stirred her up enough, to bring her to court and stand up for herself. Widows were survivors, they had to be, who else was looking out for them. Maybe, she like Ruth and Naomi, had found a way to work the angles. This widow is no longer fearful or timid. She has had enough and will not let whatever injustice she has suffered go, she will not let whoever has hurt go unpunished, she is demanding justice. She is standing her ground and will not let the judge who in some ways is also unjust and uncaring get away with his behaviour either.

She is arguing her case well, she has gone to the right person seeking justice, she has stated her case clearly and succinctly and has even given the judge a solution, just give me the justice I am owed and give it to me now.

Are we like the widow in our world? Are we standing and pleading that justice be done?

The judge we are told is not a very nice man. He may be quite good at law but in his own words he is at best indifferent and at worst uncaring. He has no fear of people or God and no respect for other people or God. However, this woman gets under his skin. Is it her continual pleading that annoys him most? Is he slowly convinced that she has been treated badly and owed some kind of justice? Or is he just trying to knock off and get on with whatever else he has planned for the day. When I worked for the courts, we knew which judges and magistrates had Wednesdays as their golf day, so you wouldn't want to have your case tabled for a Wednesday, we also knew which ones liked skiing and would want to get off early to get up the slopes for the weekend.

Anyway, the widow bothers him enough for him to do the right thing, to do the thing he should have been doing from the very beginning, give her the justice she sought.

There is a sense though that the story is not really about the widow or the judge, it is about God and us.

We cannot equate the judge with God, Jesus is clear that he is making a comparison between the two. If, even this mean judge gives justice in the end, how much more will a kind and compassionate God hear the pleas for justice from his people.

We are told that Jesus tells this story to help his disciples understand how they should pray. Keep on praying and don't give up, pray day and night.

Then there is the sting in the tail, who will Jesus find doing this, who will he find practicing their faith in such a way.

I think the widow is a great example for us in our praying and in our acting. She has lost her fear and timidity and finds her voice. She stands up for something really important, and is not satisfied with a no. She is determined to call out the unjust judge and get justice. She teaches us to be determined, to not give up, to voice our rage and to not lose heart.

We have had other examples of people persisting with working and asking for justice. Think about how many prayed and worked for the dismantling of Berlin Wall and all that symbolized. Or Mandela and others who worked and prayed for the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa. Or those who worked and prayed that indigenous people be counted as people in this country in 1967. Or those who worked and prayed for civil rights in America. People of faith who persisted to have injustices righted, to have people treated with compassion and respect, people who spent as much time on their knees, as they did protesting in the streets.

But we cannot rest on our laurels, there are still many injustices in this world that we must pray and work toward being overcome.

As I drove around Geelong yesterday, I saw the Barwon River higher than I have ever seen it before, if it gets any higher it will split the town in two. Similar images along the Maribyrnong and throughout regional Victoria, Tasmania and New South Wales. I can only think this is a result of climate change and wonder if Jesus will find us being faithful and demanding justice both for creation and the victims of climate change.

This week when I listened to Q & A, I heard impassioned pleas from several Persian women, asking for this country to make a stand for Persian men and woman fighting injustice in that country. So moved, I have decided to cut my hair very short this week as a sign of my solidarity with these people. Will Jesus find us being faithful as we pray for and demand justice for these people who are asking for justice and losing their lives as they do so?

Similarly, the internally displaced persons in Myanmar and those unjustly imprisoned or killed for standing up for justice. Like the widow will we be their voice and demand justice? Will Jesus find us praying and acting for justice for these brothers and sisters.

Sadly, we live in a world where forces abuse power, where the marginalized are exploited, where injustices are ignored, but this story tells us we cannot join their ranks. We must be like the widow who persists and bothers and does not give up until wrongs are righted. And God is with us in this, God will respond to our pleas and prayers as we work against the odds.

Will Jesus find us to be faithful and prayerful and continuing to advocate and seek justice for the weak, for the voiceless, for the vulnerable? I pray so.