

**Doing Justice**  
**Luke 18:1 –8**  
**Amos 7:7-9**  
**Preached by Dr. Cahill**  
**Babcock Presbyterian Church**  
**Sunday, October 16, 2016**

What is the best way not to describe justice? Some would say justice is in the eye of the beholder. For instance, in 1865 when the Confederacy was defeated, the slaveholders thought it was unjust that Lincoln freed the slaves.

One hundred years later, there were some who thought repealing the Jim Crow laws was unjust because business owners lost their right to pick and choose their customers.

Injustice is nothing new. In the Old Testament we read stories about Jews being enslaved, not only by the Egyptians, but by other Jews! If you were a Jew and couldn't pay your debts, the rich Jewish landowner owned you. Later in the New Testament, Jesus taught parables using slaves and their masters. Mind you, Jesus wasn't condoning slavery but he was acknowledging slavery still existed.

In this morning's parable, Jesus was telling his listeners about the need to pray for justice, especially when justice is delayed.

A self-reliant, tough lady kept bugging the daylight out of a crooked judge. She demanded justice against an unnamed opponent. Her only advantage was her persistence. She knew the judge and her opponent were in cahoots with each other. She knew the system was rigged and the fix was in. But that didn't matter. She waged an all out campaign for justice until the crooked judge caved in.

If you remember a few weeks ago I said, when you hear one of Jesus parables ask yourself two questions, "What is Jesus saying?" and "What is Jesus not saying?"

What was Jesus not saying? He didn't say if you pray long and hard enough, your prayers will wear God down, until God finally throws up his hands and cries, "Uncle!"

He also didn't say positive thinking will make your prayers come true.

Jesus did say persistent prayers are necessary because justice rarely comes without a fight.

If you ever watch the popular televangelists, you never hear them preaching justice. Instead, you hear motivational speeches (I won't call them sermons) aimed at gullible listeners who think Jesus was crucified so they can live successful lives. I even heard the late Robert Schuller say with soapy conviction, "The cross is God's plus sign!" Foolish talk like that devalues the crucifixion!

Consider this: the crucifixion is all about justice. Because we break God's laws, God demands justice. Jesus died to justify us before God.

We take comfort in saying, God is the personification of love, but God is also the personification of justice. That explains why Christ was born in Bethlehem. God so loved the world he became one of us to take the punishment we deserve. Jesus died so we can stand justified before God.

God demands justice because God is good. God gets angry when the weak and helpless are victimized by the rich and powerful. Read the prophets, especially Amos. Then read Christ's Sermon on the Mount. God is all about justice because injustice upsets the balance of creation.

Since God is justice, to be in sync with God's will we should pray persistently for justice, not only for ourselves but especially for those who have no advocates.

Years ago, a young black man in South Africa was frustrated by the injustice of apartheid. He asked his pastor, "Why doesn't God do something?"

The pastor replied, "God has done something. God created you!"

That young man was Desmond Tutu. He later became an Anglican bishop and ardent advocate for justice in South Africa. He prayed long and hard with the understanding Christians are responsible, he was responsible, for making justice happen.

Christians are commanded to make "justice for all" one of our highest priorities. Sure, pray for yourself and your personal well-being, but don't forget to include others in your litany of prayers men, women and children at the mercy of unjust judges.

Question: do you include in your prayers and meditations persistent pleas for justice, not just for yourself but especially for others? Another question: how many times have you asked God what you should do about it?

The other night I was watching a clip from the movie "The Freedom Writers." A young, idealistic teacher works in an inner-city school. Her students, a volatile mix of African Americans, Latinos, and Asians were no strangers to gang wars and domestic violence. She teaches English, but it's apparent her students have no interest in the classics. So, she gives each student a notebook to write whatever comes into their heads about themselves, their disappointments, their hopes, their dreams. The teacher promises she will not read their notebooks unless the students leave them in a lockbox for her to read after school.

Her primary goal was they, her students, coming to realize they can overcome their environments and realize their fullest potential. By building relationships with her students, and just as important, helping them build relationships with each other, there was a transformation in the classroom's atmosphere and in the students as well.

Towards the end of the story, the teacher invited a Holocaust survivor to visit the class and tell her story. She lived in Holland during the Nazi occupation and was arrested for hiding Jews so they wouldn't be sent to the death camps. After her talk, one of the students stood up and said to her, "You are my hero." The old woman protested and insisted, "I'm not a hero. I only did what was right."

Doing justice is doing the right thing, even if it cost you something.

The poet Ralph Waldo Emerson heard his good friend, Henry David Thoreau, was put in jail for an act of civil disobedience. He went to visit Thoreau and found him in his cell.

"Thoreau," Emerson asked with a wicked smile, "What are you doing in there?"

Thoreau answered, "The question is, Emerson, "What are you doing out there?"

According to the prophet Micah, God requires us, "to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God." That's a good definition of Christian discipleship. We do the right thing for the sake of love in the spirit of humility.

In every life there comes the moment to decide. "Am I going to pretend all is right with the world? Or, when I see something being done that's just plain wrong, am I going to do the right thing and bring glory to God?"

Being Christian means "being there" to do the right thing. It could mean refusing to be sucked into a dysfunctional environment at a family gathering or in the workplace. Certainly, if you choose to stick your neck out you're taking a risk that may cause you harm one way or another. But by going along with the crowd, you only harm yourself because you didn't do what was right.

In the Book of Amos, the prophet wrote: "The Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. And the Lord said to me, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said,

"See, I am setting a plumb line  
in the midst of my people  
Israel..." (Amos 7:7-8)

The prophet Amos lived during a time of great injustice. So do we. It's the job of the courts to make sure our laws are evenhanded, giving no one an unfair edge. That's the ideal but we don't live in an ideal world. Recent events show how the system can be artfully manipulated so the rich and powerful get a pass. Isn't that why the widow was determined to systematically wear down that judge who neither feared God nor respected people?

Again the question: "What's Jesus not saying in this parable?" Jesus wasn't comparing but contrasting God and the unjust judge. Remember, God is the personification of justice. The crooked judge wasn't. He only relented to the widow's persistence because he was afraid she'd

make trouble for him. Most translations of this parable read the judge decided to give in before that widow, “wears me out,” but the original Greek reads, “before she gives me a black eye.” The judge finally gave in to protect his soiled reputation.

Amos saw a plumb line in his vision. Plumb lines are still used today by carpenters to make sure their buildings aren’t crooked. God gives us plumb lines as a measuring stick to make sure we aren’t out of line in our faith and practice.

Getting our lives straight begins with prayer. “Let there be justice on earth and let it begin with me.” I suggest we all make it a practice to pray persistently for justice every day. Lift up the victims of injustice and when possible, stand up and be counted even if it means risking yourself. Never forget God created you to be a friend and a helper for those who have neither.

After teaching the parable about the widow’s persistence for justice, he looked at the people standing around him and asked, “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

Will he find it in you and me?