

Jesus tells the parable of an unjust judge and a widow who was seeking justice. Jesus tells the disciples to pray always and not lose heart. Prayer is always important. Prayer opens us to transformation. In conversation with God, we observe our wants and desires.

And through prayer we come to consider what it is that God wants and desires for us. And change happens... Instead of praying to win the lottery, we pray to be more generous... Instead of praying that God would give us an easy life, we pray that God would give us strength to do what needs to be done. Prayer transforms us...

In our parable, the widow seems to have gone through such a change. Her persistence is remarkable. When many others might have given up, she kept going. And she isn't seeking an advantage or an easy life; she is seeking justice. She is seeking to be in a right relationship with someone who has trespassed against her. In other words, she is seeking to be reconciled.

And this what we pray for in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive others who trespass against us." She is working to fix what was wronged.

We tend to think that justice or reconciliation is only for the victim, but in truth it is for both the victim and the perpetrator... Reconciliation is always a two-way street... It is not a situation where one is disadvantaged by another, but rather, where both are restored to one another.

In other words, trespassing against each other is changed into mutual relationship. What sin breaks apart; reconciliation puts back together, and that's Justice...

I think the widow is remarkable, through her prayers she has been given persistence... She's not giving up her hope of being in a restored relationship; she has strength and courage; her faith is remarkable.

She is a good contrast with the unjust judge. He doesn't care about anything other than getting her off his back. He has no regard for God or others. He doesn't care one iota about justice... And yet, he does the right thing, even if it is for the wrong reason... This widow and this judge are almost complete opposites of each other. One cares, and the other doesn't.

Human brokenness is a constant reality... As we confess every Sunday, we are in bondage to sin... What we do and why we do it are not always honorable. Sinning against one another is our context. Working at forgiveness and reconciliation is a full-time job, working for justice is a full-time job...

The parable is very clear that justice is a value of the Kingdom of God. Justice is all about right relationship, relationship with God and one another.

Working for justice, is hard work... It's not only a constant, we all have different values, and different ways we are offended. Working for justice is a little like our Old Testament reading this morning, it's about wrestling, sometimes we have to struggle with how justice looks. Because it's not easy.

Quick story... When I was an administrator, I had an employee accused of sexually abusing one of the residents. I read the incident report and promptly called the County Adult Protection Agency. I asked if I should notify the police, they said they would make the call.

As an administrator, it was my job to report it, it was my job to facilitate an investigation, and it was my job to implement any prevention plans. And of course, it was also my job to fire the employee if I didn't like what I discovered. I immediately put him on suspension pending the outcome of the investigation.

The Adult Protection worker came over and we started interviewing residents and staff. We talked to everyone... And this case was difficult. The person who made the accusation had a diagnosis of schizophrenia; and she was the first to admit that she sometimes had difficulty distinguishing reality from hallucination.

And to complicate things, she often made racist comments... And of course, the person accused was a person of color. And to make matters even worse, although the other staff liked and trusted him, he didn't have anyone else who could corroborate his side of the story.

The adult protection investigator ruled that it was inconclusive and noted the resident had a history of making similar accusations, which was true. But it didn't matter to me, I still had a responsibility to every single person who lived there! It came down to me to decide the employee's fate.

He came in to talk with me, young black man... Smart and compassionate... He knew his rights; he had talked with an attorney. He also knew the predicament—

for future employment for himself, and also the liability for the facility... He knew how bad everything looked, and he maintained that he was completely innocent. He claimed he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. And amazingly we had a remarkable conversation.

We talked about a demotion, transferring him to a job that didn't have any contact with the residents. But in the end, he offered to resign, and I accepted. He didn't want to work under suspicion, and I didn't blame him. And truth be told, his career in human services was likely finished. And he knew it...

It was an awful week, and I've often wondered what justice would look like in that situation. Truth is, although we tried hard to know the facts, it came down to the word of two people against each other. And it was a tragedy all around.

The idea of reconciliation between the two of them seemed impossible. Justice for one would be injustice to the other, and vice versa. It was a conundrum. I just had to rely on my values and responsibilities.

And the residents were my priority! The woman who made the accusation was my priority. We got her into counseling and did everything we could to help and protect her. She had a difficult life to begin with, and regardless of what happened, I hope she was able to heal... I hope her life didn't become marked by deepening fears and trauma.

And, I've also wondered about the life of that young black man. Was he actually guilty? Was he actually innocent? Did he go about his life being resentful, thinking that life was stacked against him? I have no idea...

Persistence to work toward right relationship is hard. Human justice is fraught with all kinds of problems. We all have our own perspectives, even our entitled sense of truth...

And exactly because of that difficulty, it's important for me to believe and have trust in God's justice. The justice that God will bring, on earth as it is in heaven. Our God who sees all things and knows all things... Our God who desires to be in relationship with us, and for us to be in right relationship with each other.

Think about this a little bit... How would it be for you, what kind of experience would it be, to go to everyone you have ever wronged, knowing that the truth is out there, knowing that God knows the truth of every one of those situations. Initially it's a little scary isn't it... It is for me...

But then imagine how freeing it would feel to be fully forgiven by those people... No longer would you have to live as though you were responsible for hurting them. That burden would be lifted... There's freedom in not living a lie... No more guilt or shame...

And then, on the other end of it, how would it feel to have everyone who has ever wronged you, coming to you and asking for forgiveness... Now that would also be wonderful, wouldn't it!

I often think about heaven as that place where we are all finally reconciled with one another. A place where truth is remembered, and a place where truth makes us re-membered to one another.

The good news today is that God is all about justice, bringing us in right relationship with one another. Because of sin, it is so hard for us... But for God everything is possible. Every Sunday we confess that we are in bondage to sin; we also hear God's promise of forgiveness.

And as Luther says, where there is forgiveness there is life. And this is abundant life, a life where we are all redeemed with one another. A life where we walk out of the shadows of lies and shame and deceit, and live into the light of truth, love, mercy and forgiveness. God searches our hearts and knows our truth; and He brings healing, wholeness and more...

God is a just judge, and He cares deeply, about you... the whole you...

Amen...