

GETTING IT RIGHT

October 20, 2019

Pentecost 19

[Jeremiah 31:27-34](#)

[Luke 18:1-8](#)

(prayer)

Some modern proverbs:

"Short-term pain for long-term gain"

or more succinctly...

"No pain, no gain"

"When a door closes, a window opens"

"When given lemons, make lemonade"

"Let go; Let God"

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These are a motivational statements to encourage persisting through non-ideal times.

In the gym or on the practice field, they might entice a few extra reps.

In a time of grief, they might allow someone to take the unwelcomed steps to prepare for a life without a departed loved one.

And when you just can't seem to catch a break, they might get you out of bed in the morning.

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There is some value in these kind of pithy, meme-worthy sayings, because -- moving beyond a difficult experience is not something that comes naturally to everyone.

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In my life I have experienced the two extremes of moving past difficulty:

1. Find a workable solution to eliminate the difficulty as soon as possible.

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2. Make significant, lasting changes to the circumstances so the difficulty is no longer an issue.

Here's a parenting example I have some personal experience with (some of you might be able to relate): *two of the kids aren't getting along and the whole household is caught up in their drama, so: to get a minute of instant peace, you put each one into a timeout in seperate rooms and hope that cooler heads will prevail. If you're lucky, they won't just go back to the fight as soon as the . But that peace might not last, so another option is: to sit down and figure out if there is some changes are needed in the lives of everyone involved, so that there is less likelihood that future problems will arrive. Of course, if you're really desperate and time is a factor, try bribing them: "if I give you each a cookie, will you get along for the rest of the day?"*

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And yet... in truly hard times, a person can just get stuck and wisdom about persistence might have little effect.

Jesus knew this.

The early church of the gospel of Luke knew that.

Being among those first generations of the followers of Jesus included significant challenges -- as people sought to have an authentic place within the wider cultural and religious situations.

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The author of Luke was aware of a teaching of Jesus that did not end up in any of the other gospels. It was our second reading today. It is often called the [*Parable of the Unjust Judge*](#) or the *Parable of the Importunate or Persistent Widow*.

You may have noticed that Luke added an editorial comment before relaying Jesus' parable. Although, there is no record of how Jesus (himself) hoped people would interpreted the story, Luke tells his readers that *Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.*

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The story is pretty straight forward.

A person believes that they have been treated unjustly by someone else and persistently pursues a fair resolution. Even when denied, this person won't give up until justice is served.

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Now, Jesus adds some details that make a right resolution even less likely:

- The judge is a powerful man;
- The complainant is a vulnerable, widowed woman. In the patriarchy of the day, normally she would need her husband or father represent her in court. Maybe, it was her lack of legal standing that allowed the judge to dismiss her case out of hand.

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Jesus doesn't give us any insight into the merits of the widow's case, but we are certainly meant to presume that justice was being denied her. In fact, a fair assumption is to say that it was really such an open and shut case that if she could just get the judge to hear her case, the law would be in her favour. The widow was not being denied justice because her case was weak -- only because the judge wouldn't give her the time of day. Jesus is clear to point out that this judge did not respect God or the law.

A lot of us understand that just giving up can seem like the best option when there are so many roadblocks between us and where we need to go. We evaluate the value of the short-term pain versus the long-term gain. Sometimes, it becomes more important just make the pain go away.

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The judge in Jesus parable seems to be relying on this understandable aspect of human nature.

But the woman kept appearing in his court room every day. Day after day, she demanded justice the law owed her. She persisted to the point that it was the judge who ended up

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struggling with the short-term pain / long-term gain dilemma.
[Fine!] I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.

The obvious moral of the story: *persistence pays off.*

A bold statement that comes out of this parable is that *justice is worth working for.*

Last week, I quoted Jim Wallis, the editor of the progressive, evangelical Christian publication, *Sojourners: Hope is believing in spite of the evidence and then watching the evidence change.* If you take a look at sojo.net, you will see that Wallis is not taking about *passively* observing evidence change, but believes that we are to be *active* evidence changers.

If justice is to flow like a mighty river, the people of God (like the widow in Jesus' story) are to be rushing water carving new channels in a stubborn landscape.

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Justice is worth working for!

Some examples of situations worthy of persistence...

- resist the call to believe that *we never did it that way before* is a valid argument; or its companion excuse: we tried that twenty years ago and it didn't work.
- refusing to let your reputation be maligned.
- refusing to give up on those affected by greed.
- working for unpopular, but important causes:

During a Whitehouse press conference this past week announcing that the 2020 G7 conference was going to be held in Miami in June, a reporter asked if Climate Change was going to be on the agenda, the answer was "NO!" Do the climate skeptic politicians think that refusal is going to

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stop the debate on what to do about climate change?

I remember many years ago (before nobel prize and oscar) when Al Gore persistently brought his inconvenient truth message to oil rich Calgary (it was interesting to see conservative politicians and David Suzuki in the same room).

The former VP's persistence was echoed two days ago Greta Thornburg [marched](#) in a Fridays for Future Climate rally - she and the hundreds of others who ended up at the Alberta Legislature persisted in spite the absence of any provincial government representatives, a convoy of 50 trucks staging a counter protest, and a persistent online campaign to paint her as mentally ill or the victim of manipulation.



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- not buying into the message (from others or from deep within you) that you don't have value and deserve a measure of happiness. [Genesis](#) reminds us that we are created in the *very good image of God*.

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Jesus' final point in the parable today is that God is eternally faithful and just. Our God does not abandon us. Jesus points out if an unjust judge can actually be driven to justice, we can definately count on our persistent ever-just God.

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The passage we heard today from Jeremiah was written at a time when God's people could not be faulted for considering the value of giving up. Their homeland had been overrun, the temple of Solomon laid on ruins, and

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most of the people were forced to live in refugee squalor as exiles hundreds of kilometres away in Babylon.

The prophet points to a hopeful future when God's justice is so intimately a part of the people's lives that it will be as if the Torah was not written on stone or parchment, but on the heart.

Jeremiah lived in a time when Judah was the only remaining Hebrew nation. Northern Israel had been overrun and lost to history a century earlier. And that came after centuries of a divided Hebrew monarchy that followed the death of King Solomon.

When Jeremiah speaks God's promise of a just restoration for the Judean exiles, he is clear to point out that this promise is for both the house of Judah **and** the house of Israel. Both will be re-planted the prophet preaches.

Justice would come to the exiles of today **and** the forgotten and abandoned of centuries past.

The days are surely coming, says the LORD.

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The work of justice never starts big and it seldom moves quickly.

As Margaret Mead said: *Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.*

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Justice builds on the momentum of small faithful and persistent acts.

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And yet, once momentum is gained and critical mass is obtained - the just world becomes the new normal.

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[Let there be peace on earth](#)

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and let it begin with me.

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Let it be so.

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Let us pray:

Empower us, God, to preach Jesus' good news when voices of division dominate, to live peace when chaos dominates, to be patient and humble when justice comes slowly. Amen.

#79MV "Spirit, Open My Heart"

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