

Pentecost 19, Lectionary 29, Year C
Sunday, October 16, 2022
Luke 18:1-8

“Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.” And Jesus ends the story with a question: “And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

On Friday evening a handful of us gathered at Faith Lutheran for opening worship at a small conference on church renewal. As part of our worship we were invited to come forward and write a note, just a word or two on a sticky note, about some of the things we’ve experienced and lived with during these last two and a half years that we would just like to let go and be done with. We wrote the notes and pasted them to a rough cross that stood at the front of the church. We were kind of naming all the things we’ve struggled with over the last few years or maybe even for a lifetime, putting them at the cross that is somehow reconciling all things in heaven and on earth, as Paul writes in Colossians. The anonymous notes mentioned so much that has become familiar, from our loneliness during lockdowns through our fears for the health of those we love to our regrets about strained and broken relationships. Whatever you’ve felt during this pandemic, there was a note about it on that cross.

These were notes from people who I think have probably too much too recently been close to losing heart. I know that’s what was on my mind as I wrote my own note. So many of us have been so close to losing heart, and one thing we remembered as we gathered at that cross on Friday night is that Jesus is with and Jesus is for everyone who is losing heart.

So Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. And then he tells that story about a widow who does not lose heart. It's a story about a widow who comes to a judge and demands that he grant her justice against her opponent. We don't hear any more details, just that she demands justice against her opponent. We know that she is a widow, and you might know by now that widows in Jesus' day would struggle more than most to make ends meet without a husband. So someone has come after her in a courtroom conflict, and she goes to the judge to demand that she be given justice. That the right thing be done. That her opponent not be allowed to break her spirit. And she demands and demands and persists and persists and she just won't stop. She persists.

Finally the judge throws up his hands and says, "I don't care about God, I don't care about people, I don't care about this woman, but she just won't stop. If I don't give her what she wants, she's finally going to up and smack me" – that's actually more or less what it says in Greek - it's actually a boxing term. The judge says, "If I don't give her what she wants, she'll give me a black eye." Maybe she's bothered him about it all day, or all week, or maybe she's outlived three or four judges who wouldn't listen and she's been demanding justice for decades and she just won't stop. She's a feisty woman. No one can tell her to keep quiet. Well, they can, but she won't. No one can ignore her until she goes away, because she won't. She persists.

Look and listen closely, and you might see her and hear her today. She looks an awful lot like the mother of a young woman who disappeared three

years ago, and this mother won't let the case or her daughter disappear quietly. So she keeps after whoever will or will not listen until some kind of justice is done.

This woman who persists looks like yet another mother or father or older sister or brother who struggle to find food today on this World Food Day, and their lives demand justice; that everyone have enough because there is more than enough to go around. And the woman who persists looks like a relief worker, or an activist, or maybe a worker at the Urban or St. Boniface Streetlinks, living lives that call for justice. And they persist.

Maybe this woman who persists looks like a researcher working late into the night for hours and hours and hours again and again for years and years because she's sure that sometime all of this work will find a cure for cancer.

Or maybe this widow who persists even looks like a family praying around the bed of a loved one...who hasn't lost heart but whose body has just had enough.

Maybe this widow who persists looks like any one of those people in a church on a Friday evening sticking Post-It notes to a cross and keeping on when it might just be so easy to lose heart.

Maybe she just looks like whoever it is who has helped you along when you just felt like you'd had enough.

There's always this widow...

Jesus tells a story about a widow who persists and persists. And although the judge says, "OK, I'll give her what she wants," Jesus never says that she got what she demanded. The point is that she persists. And maybe as we gather and

worship and pray here today, she's still persisting. Listen... praying for you, praying for me, praying for us, persisting in prayer for a broken creation and for divided nations. And her persistence nudges us along too, because sometimes when you or I or we are losing heart it's someone else's persistence or prayer or keeping on that keeps us going.

When the son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?

Faith can mean so many things. Faith can look like trust, like when a child who is only a few days old and can't really think in any clear way can just tell that when mom's there there will be food. They just trust it. Faith can look like obedience, like when Jesus says "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," and somebody somewhere says, "OK, I'll do that," and they accept Jesus' call to respond to violence with something other than more violence. Or sometimes faith can look like this tradition and these teachings we belong to, and so we talk about "the faith."

And sometimes faith can just look like persistence.

It's like when a foreign soldier comes to Jesus and says, "I need you to heal my beloved servant. I really do." And Jesus says, "I've never seen faith like this before."

It's like when a woman with a bad reputation comes into a fancy house where Jesus is eating with fancy people and she washes Jesus' feet and soothes them with a touch after his long day. Everyone in the room is looking at her and thinking she shouldn't be there, and they're wondering why Jesus lets her do that, but she persists. And Jesus says, "Go in peace, your faith has saved you."

It's those ten lepers we heard about last week who see Jesus in the distance and they call out "Jesus, Master, have mercy." And they're all healed, and Jesus says to one – and to all – "Your faith has saved you."

It's like this widow today: "I demand justice and I won't stop demanding it."

Faith persists not because it's bossy or demanding or trying to get its way. Faith persists because it trusts, it knows, that God is good and the word of life and hope and healing will have the final say.

5 So when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?

Yes.

Even if there were just that one widow left who keeps on praying and trusting, then there will be faith found on earth - faith in the one who can always raise up new life. Jesus will walk among people who keep on looking for answers about what happened to their mother or sister or daughter or friend, and he will find faith on earth among these people who know that life is stronger than death. Jesus will walk into a hospital room and find faith on earth as he hears a father praying for a sick daughter or a sick daughter praying for a heartbroken father because they both know that life is stronger than death. Jesus will walk along in a broken place like Canada and will find the faith of people who keep on trusting that reconciliation is possible – between indigenous people and settlers, between voters on a cool October day, between people divided in the same church or the same house. Will Jesus find faith on earth? Of course. Even here, on a Sunday morning in Fort Richmond, Jesus finds faith on earth where people come to pray for healing or for justice or for peace; for ourselves, for one another, for the

world. We persist, because the God who hears us is like that widow...Because God keeps on and keeps on and keeps on. God persists, like a woman pestering a judge for justice; and God will not stop until all are healed, all relationships are made right, and all is made well.

AMEN