

Glenview Community Church
Glenview, Illinois

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
16 October 2022

Luke 18:1-8

The Judge of the Quick and the Dead

A Sermon preached by Rev. Dr. James M. Matarazzo, Jr.

Text: Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:1-18)

I. Persistent Prayer?

Many preachers consider this parable about the unjust judge as a Jesus telling his disciples about the necessity for persistent prayer. The widow keeps pestering the unjust judge – who finally grants her justice, not because he fears God (the supreme judge) or his community (the court of public opinion), but only so the widow will stop bothering him. Thus, it would seem, is the role of prayer.

Jesus refers to God's chosen ones who cry out to God night and day for justice. These chosen ones are the Jewish people, the children of Israel, not just the disciples and not, the latter-day Christians. The Christian Church does not exist yet – it is created on the day of Pentecost after Christ's Ascension. The disciples are simply Jewish followers of Jesus who believe he is the Messiah. They do not call themselves Christians. The salvation of Christ is indeed extended to the Gentiles, to non-Jews. Jesus makes this

clear when he heals Samaritans, Syrians, and Romans. But the Jesus Movement begins as a Jewish movement. To put it another way, Jews of children of Abraham by blood as well as spirit. Gentile Christians are children of Abraham by adoption by the Holy Spirit. This happens to us as baptism or if we aren't baptized then by grace through faith.

II. Quick Justice?

But let us be frank: Jesus says that God will not delay and will quickly grant God's chosen ones the justice they seek. But we know that this is not often true in this life. We know that many cry out day and night for justice and are denied it. Yet, I am not accusing Jesus of speaking falsely. Rather, he already speaking of his Second Coming in glory. This is confusing, no doubt. When we hear the word 'quickly' in the gospels, it often refers to the Last Day, the final judgment – or, to use the biblical language borrowed by "The Terminator" science fiction films, "Judgment Day." This gets to the heart of the matter of who Jesus is. Is he a human prophet? Or is he God made manifest in human flesh? Or both? The traditional answer is that Jesus is both, human and divine. But I believe that Jesus does not care about our doctrinal definitions. But he does care that we do the tasks he commands us.

So, for Jesus, the justice of God does come quickly because to the Eternal God human time reducible to the blinking of an eye. God is not bound by space and time. Thus, for Jesus, his return is indeed happening 'quickly'. And this is unfortunate for us humans in the sense that we may not see justice in our lifetimes – rather, what Jesus means is the moment of death is the moment of justice. People in the time of Jesus lived an average of 35 years. Life was short and often brutal. Thus, quick justice was post-mortem (after death). The dead would rise in glory and they would be given full justice. Don't misunderstand me – I know it's not fair. Why should people have to die to get justice? We should indeed work for justice here and now in this life, but we know most will not obtain it, try as we may.

III. The "Quick" Justice is the Second Coming

Then Jesus says something that makes sense of this 'quick' justice. He says: "But when the Son of Man returns, will he find faith on earth?" The quick justice is granted by the

returning Christ. Those of you who recall the Apostles Creed, may remember the traditional version in its pronouncements about Jesus:

I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
Born of the Virgin Mary,
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, dead, and buried:
He descended into hell;
The third day he rose again from the dead;
He ascended into heaven,
And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
From thence he shall come **to judge the quick and the dead.**

And there it is, the Son of Man, meaning Jesus according to his humanity and not according to his divinity, will come to be our judge – he will be the Just Judge and he will give perfect justice. The word “quick” means living or lively as well as speedily in early modern English. The dead will rise and be judged by the Perfect Human – and Christ’s justice is not like our courts of law with sentences and prisons. To be judged by Jesus is salvation itself. He is the saving judge who rights all wrongs. The living who are alive at Christ’s return are also judged and transformed by Christ’s gaze and glory. All that is unjust, cruel, or evil shall melt away. The parable is really foretelling the time where no one will have to badger unjust human authorities for imperfect justice. In the Kingdom of God, there is nothing unjust. This is the Easter Utopia, the resurrected life, the possession of eternity.

OK, that’s great. When we die or when Jesus returns – whichever comes first, we will get perfect justice. Those school yard bullies will get there’s -- finally! But what does this say now? I return to the question Jesus asks: will he find faith on earth when he returns? Will there be any faith left? Jesus realizes that what is quick or speedy for him is not so for humans. It has been 2000 years since Christ walked among us and his return may not even be timebound. But he asks if he will find faith. And the persistent widow gives us a clue. Will we, the followers of Jesus in an age of diminishing faith, continue to work for justice, oppose oppression, and care for our fellow creatures?

IV. Until Christ's Return - Corrie ten Boom

For her efforts to hide Jews from arrest and deportation during the German occupation of the Netherlands, Corrie ten Boom (1892-1983) received recognition from the Yad Vashem Remembrance Authority as one of the "Righteous Among the Nations" on December 12, 1967. In resisting Nazi persecution, ten Boom acted in concert with her religious beliefs, her family experience, and the Dutch resistance. Her defiance led to imprisonment, internment in a concentration camp, and loss of family members who died from maltreatment while in Nazi German custody.

The ten Boom family were members of the Dutch Reformed Church, which protested Nazi persecution of Jews as an injustice to fellow human beings and an affront to divine authority. In her autobiography, ten Boom repeatedly cited religious motivations for hiding Jews, particularly her family's strong belief in a basic tenet of their religion: the equality of all human beings before God. Their religious activities had also brought the family a history of personal connections to the Jewish community. Corrie's grandfather had supported efforts to improve Christian-Jewish relations in the nineteenth century in the Netherlands. Her brother Willem, a Dutch Reformed minister assigned to convert Jews, studied antisemitism, and ran a nursing home for elderly of all faiths. In the late 1930s that nursing home became a refuge for Jews fleeing from Germany.

After World War II began, members of the ten Boom family became involved in Dutch resistance efforts. Two nephews worked in resistance cells. Various family members sheltered young men sought by the Nazis for forced labor and assisted Jews in contacting persons willing to hide them. Corrie became directly involved in these efforts when, along with her father and sister Betsie, she decided to hide Jews in the family home in Haarlem. Using her job as a watchmaker in her father's shop as a cover, Corrie built contacts with resistance workers, who assisted her in procuring ration books and building a hiding place in the family home.

Six people, among them both Jews and resistance workers, hid in this hiding place when the Gestapo (German secret state police) raided the house on February 28, 1944. Those in hiding remained undiscovered. Several days after the raid resistance workers transferred them to other locations. They survived the war. In the meantime, however, the Gestapo had arrested Corrie ten Boom, her father, her brother and two sisters, and

other family members. In addition, the Gestapo arrested several resistance workers who had unwittingly entered the house during the raid, as well as many family acquaintances who had been attending a prayer meeting in the living room. Altogether, the Gestapo arrested some 30 people in the ten Boom family home that day.

After holding them briefly in a jail near the The Hague, the Gestapo released all but three of the ten Boom family members. Corrie ten Boom, her older sister Betsie, and her father Casper remained in prison. Casper ten Boom became sick in prison and died in a hospital corridor only ten days after the arrest. The sisters remained in prison. In September 1944, the Nazis deported Corrie and Betsie ten Boom to the Ravensbrück concentration camp in Germany. In Ravensbrück, the sisters managed to stay together until Betsie died that December in the camp.

Due to an administrative error, the camp administration released Corrie ten Boom in late December 1944 and she returned to the Netherlands, where she reunited with surviving members of her family. It is likely this error saved her life.

After the war, ten Boom advocated reconciliation as a means for overcoming the psychological scars left by the Nazi occupation. She later traveled the world as an evangelist, motivational speaker, and social critic, referring to her experiences in Ravensbrück as she offered solace to prisoners and protested the Vietnam War.

Corrie ten Boom's story is an example of faith on earth – the faith that Jesus wants and hopes he finds when he returns. This faith is living, quickening, and engaged in actions for others. The Apostle James wrote that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:26). It is true that Protestants, like Corrie ten Boom, believe that we are saved by faith alone through grace alone – we cannot be saved by works. But that the grace that is ours urges us to do good works – to have faith and do nothing is not an option for the Christian. Our Lord, the Judge of the quick and the dead, wants us to have living, quickening faith that is willing to go where we may not wish to go, even the valley of the shadow of death, for the sake of others who also bear God's image. We can't all be like Corrie ten Boom, but even the smallest act of lovingkindness might be life saving to another person. And the Talmud says that whoever saves a single life, it is as if she has saved the universe. Let us therefore have living faith so we may great our Judge with joy.