

## Creating Justice Where There is No More Justice

Sermon for the 2<sup>nd</sup> to Last Sunday of the Church Year

Sermon Text: Luke 18:1-8



*And He told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. <sup>2</sup> He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. <sup>3</sup> And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' <sup>4</sup> For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, <sup>5</sup> yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" <sup>6</sup> And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. <sup>7</sup> And will not God give justice to His elect, who cry to Him day and night? Will He delay long over them? <sup>8</sup> I tell you, He will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?"*

In the terrible war against Ukraine, there is a special unit tasked with identifying the remains of people and bringing them back to their family. Such people want to give validation and dignity back to the dead, no matter if it is friend or foe. Sometimes, nothing else remains other than a couple of burned bones and an empty pack of cigarettes. These people, who collect such remains, receive no medal and no awards. And yet, one should give them a medal because they show us that there is a justice that surpasses hostility, death, and desolation and is indestructible.

Our Lord Jesus gives us an example today for which we can give the heading: Creating Justice Where There is No More Justice. And furthermore, Jesus wants to encourage us to hope when everything seems hopeless! He wants to encourage us to do good where there is only evil. He wants to encourage us to believe in God where there is no God. Jesus wants to encourage us to not stop praying even in the situation of unbelief. And to illustrate this, He uses an example from His day. In the time of Jesus, widows had no justice. No one had to protect them, no one had to care for them. Widows in Jesus' time had only one choice – which was to beg. Jesus puts this widow against a judge. Judges in Jesus' time had the job of providing justice. They had to advocate for justice where justice was trampled upon and where people were being treated with injustice. But in Jesus' example, a judge is presented who had absolutely no interest in such justice. He stood neither for good nor for justice nor for God. And the question is, how could a widow, who had no justice anyway, expect justice from this unjust judge? With this, Jesus intentionally presents the most hopeless case of all. He gives us an example where there is absolutely no hope for justice. Jesus wants to show us with this that He knows very well all our hopeless situations. Jesus knows what the human condition is like. He knows that the whole of human history is marked by injustice triumphing and justice is just like the remaining bones of soldiers that decay unheeded and undignified under a dry tree. Since Cain and Abel, there is blood that cries out to heaven... and Jesus knows that we could lose our faith in God in the face of death and hopelessness. We could stop believing and we could stop praying. Death and decay which spreads everywhere is too convincing. Have you asked the question: "Where is God in all this?" And have you asked the question, "Why doesn't God do anything? Why didn't God do something when women and children were slaughtered in Iran?" Jesus Himself knows how our world functions. He knows that the world and its bitter cruelty seem to be unstoppable. Jesus Himself had to experience immeasurable despair in His own body. In the end, nothing of Jesus remained except for an abused body on the cross, undignified and battered. No one cared for His justice. Even His prayers went unanswered. And that is why the question is highly explosive and important – is there something else? Or must evil remain unanswered?

When we look at the way the world is going, we might very well come to the conclusion that there would be nothing but evil. When we look at the way the world is going, we could come to the conclusion that there is no God.

When we look at our world, we could come to the conclusion that there are only worldly laws and we cannot change anything about them. When we observe our world, we could start to think that even praying doesn't help and everything happens as it will happen, so it makes no difference if we pray or not, the result remains the same. Jesus stands up against all this despair and gives us a very powerful parable, which is the parable of this widow who has no justice who stands up against the unwillingness of the unjust judge. Her situation is completely hopeless and yet she doesn't give up. Even after countless refusals, she didn't give up. She believes when there is nothing left to believe, she hopes where there is no hope, and she is convinced that good will triumph in the end. The wonderful thing about this parable is that her persistent plea is finally successful. She receives justice. Jesus purposefully compared a widow without justice to an unjust judge and He wants to tell us: if this widow without justice can go against an unjust judge, how much more will our prayers be answered by God, who is the origin and source of justice and righteousness. Unlike the unjust judge, God is a protector for those without justice and a guarantor for widows. We don't need to convince God anymore. We don't need to pester God. God is for us from the beginning. God is on our side from the beginning. So when Jesus uses this parable to encourage us to pray, it doesn't mean that we have to convince God. God already wants to answer our prayers. With prayer, it's more about the fact that something has to change in us. Prayer is for our sake. After all, we might get tired of praying. Like in the parable of the 10 Virgins, it could happen that we no longer have enough oil, that is faith, in our lamps and therefore no longer trust in God. That's why the last sentence of Jesus' parable is also a very disturbing: "when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?" Jesus doesn't answer this question. It's a question that He deliberately leaves open. We must take this question with us. I must ask myself: "Do I still have faith?" This question grates on my conscience and unsettles me. I feel the need to go within myself and seek such faith in myself. I feel the need to have a faith like this widow who, despite a hopeless situation, didn't stop praying. And yet I don't find this faith nor this persistence within me. So, I must go back to the teller of this parable. I need to go back to Jesus and ask Him how it all works. Jesus, what do You mean by all this? And, Jesus, what do You want from me today when I stand before You and pray? What stands out to me is how naturally Jesus tells this parable. He doesn't say something like: "This is how I imagine it" or "It could be something like this." And Jesus doesn't even say, you need to pray like this widow. No, He simply says: "God creates our justice."

Jesus is the only one who can discern God's heart. For this reason, Jesus not only encourages us to pray, but immediately confirms the answer to our prayers. He tells us that God wants us to pray and confirms that God will answer our prayers too. Jesus states this unconditionally. There are no secret tricks or tutorials on how one should or must correctly pray. There is only the acknowledgment that prayer is much more than our identity. Prayer is God's justice itself and the foundation for it is Jesus. God's answer for all our prayers is Jesus Himself and in prayer, we walk in Jesus in prayer and become like Him. So, God not only asks us to pray more and more, but He gives us Jesus as the answer to all our prayers. He brings us to Jesus and His life. Through this, He shows us very clearly that our praying is not a reinforcement of our human will or thoughts. No, quite the opposite. In prayer, we come out of ourselves and go to Jesus! When we pray, we become like Jesus. And the amazing thing is that not only do we become like Jesus, but He becomes like us! Jesus connects Himself to us, accepts our weakness, and makes our concerns God's concerns! He wants nothing but us and our salvation from sin, death, and the devil. Because Jesus has placed Himself so completely on our side, we can't help but present Him with our completely personal and daily needs. Just like the widow did. That God establishes justice for us is confirmed through Jesus because just as God didn't leave Jesus in death but resurrected Him, He doesn't leave us in death either, He will also resurrect us. We will certainly experience many more situations where injustice and death loom large and powerful. And exactly at that point, we will look to Jesus, hoping, believing, and praying... and even more so when there is nothing left of life but a few bones and an empty pack of cigarettes. Amen.