

Persistent Voices - A Reflection on Luke 18: 1-8

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We have heard many persistent voices over the past six weeks as the federal election campaign has rolled out around us. The various leaders are telling us what to think and why they offer the best future for Canada. They have money and large teams to help them spread the word. The media follows them eagerly to capture new sound bites for their 24 hour news channels. When you are the leader of a mainstream political party it is easy to get your message out. Your voice fills the airways. Your ads flash across TV screens in living rooms and kitchens and bedrooms. Signs line the roadways. It is hard to ignore. It is a loud and clanging persistent voice.

This morning we are going to turn our ear to another kind of voice that deserves our attention. This voice does not have a large budget. This voice does not have a ready audience eager to hear its message. This voice must work very hard to be heard above the clamour of politics, big business, and a consumer culture where the emphasis is on getting ahead and looking out for yourself.

It is the voice of those seeking justice, the voice of those left behind, those who our current culture ignores or paints as undeserving or worse, as deserving of their fate. It is the voice of those that we, as Christians, are asked to support and walk with as they seek justice.

Every week we at St. David's light candles to remind ourselves of three examples of this voice in the world - the affirming candle for the voice of LGBTQ+ persons, the candle for the Earth whose life is threatened in so many ways and the candle for the indigenous peoples of Canada who have been persecuted and marginalized since Europeans first crossed the ocean and claimed this land as their own. These candles remind us that there are many people and creatures for whom life is a daily struggle because the justice system, the political system and the economic system are all tilted in favour of those who happen to be born into the dominant culture of our time. These flickering flames are signs of the places where persistent voices are being lifted seeking justice and are falling on deaf ears.

Today's scripture story is an example of one such person seeking justice. It is a story of strength and determination and courage. It is the story of a widow. In the time of Jesus, widows were extremely vulnerable. Widows along with orphans and aliens are often used in Biblical stories as examples of those needing special protection. The fact that this particular widow advocates for herself unattended by a male family member highlights her extreme vulnerability.

In our story, she seeks out a judge to grant her justice. This judge is a corrupt individual concerned only with his own best interests. The judge turns a blind eye, forcing the widow to repeatedly return pleading for justice. She goes home repeatedly disappointed. She doesn't give up though. She keeps going back, banging on his door and repeating her story. Finally, the judge gives in and grants her justice so that he can go back to his peaceful, selfish and corrupt existence. This story has a happy ending for the widow.

It is a story to remind us that in the fight for justice never give up hope. It is a story to remind us that God is on the side of the vulnerable. It is a story to remind us that the work of justice demands energy and persistence and courage to stand up for what is right.

Today, all these centuries later, there are still those in our world seeking justice from a corrupt and selfish world. This story is, unfortunately, still very relevant. The work of justice is hard work that demands persistence, creativity, and courage. This morning we are going to look at a story that reminds me strongly of the persistent widow.

This is the story of the many ways our indigenous sisters are working persistently to find justice for the thousands of missing and murdered indigenous women. I first encountered this work for justice when I was studying diaconal ministry in Winnipeg in 2006. The learning circle coincided with the annual walk in Winnipeg to highlight the plight of the MMIW and their families. I walked with a couple hundred others to the beat of the drum, as we remembered these missing and murdered women. There were grieving families walking with photos of the missing women. These families spoke of their pain and their frustration at the lack of action by police and the justice system to find the people responsible for their loved one's deaths. It was a powerful and painful, yet hopeful experience. Standing in solidarity is so important in the work of justice.

The first women's memorial march was held in 1992 in response to the murder of a woman on Powell Street in Vancouver. Almost 30 years later this movement has expanded all across Canada and now is expressed in many other ways. One of the ways is the Red Dress protest. Lets watch and learn about this creative and persistent way some indigenous women are seeking justice for the MMIW.

<https://www.nfb.ca/film/protect-our-future-daughters/>

The image of a red dress holding space for each one of the thousands of woman who are missing and murdered is a powerful one. Each dress speaks of a vibrant, lively voice now silenced forever in a society that, to this day, does not value and respect the first peoples of our land.

Like the persistent widow, these women have drawn on courage and persistence to tell the story of their missing sisters, hoping for justice one day. They have marched and lobbied and used creativity and persistence to tell their story. They have knocked on the doors of our consciences, pleading to be heard, demanding to be heard. They have invited us into their story, hoping that we will walk with them in the work of justice. Their voices are beginning to make a difference but there is much more work to do.

Jesus, in telling the story of the persistent widow, reminds us that persistence and courage are needed in the work of justice. God is the God of all. Each and every person, each and every living thing is God's creation and deserves justice and love. We, as followers of Jesus, are asked to keep on with the work of Jesus in our world.

There are way too many corrupt judges in this world. There are way too many, like the persistent widow, seeking justice without the help and support of a compassionate community supporting them and walking with them. Let us stand with them as they knock on the doors of governments and businesses and society.

Let us do our part in making our world a place of hope for all. Amen.