

Scripture:
Mark 12: 28-34
Luke 18:1-8

Persistent Hope

I've never much liked the parable of the persistent widow for a lot of reasons, I don't like the judge and his authority and attitude and I don't like people who don't get the message. No means no. Perhaps I don't like the persistent widow because I am not very good at being persistent myself.

Suddenly though I find myself connecting with her, rooting for her, wanting to stand next to her and shout "you go girl, you've got this." Perhaps I am starting to realize I can be more persistent and resilient than I thought, maybe I am more like the widow than I ever realized.

You see I have been in this town of Squamish for awhile now. When I got here I felt called here, it was where I was meant to be. I felt that way for the first several years and then things got more difficult. I became connected and rooted in a way I hadn't been that for a long time or maybe never had been. I found my life partner, I started a family and I began to hear the message of loving your neighbour go beyond the walls of my workplace into my parish region. Now that wasn't new in me, it is more like it was revived. My innate need to care for others kept expanding within me. I began to take the commandment to love God and neighbour literally in a way I don't think I had before. See I've always had professions where I cared for those in need, those less fortunate. From youth on the streets or in trouble homes, to being a foster parent, to a social worker, to a counsellor, to a front line worker in women's shelters, to a pastor and minister. I've always taking loving others seriously. My life verse is James 1:27 "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God,.. is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world." And I have started to realize in a new way how much more it means to do things and live with people rather than doing things for people. As we recognize the image of God and the dignity and equality of all people we view them from a different lens.

It hasn't always been easy for Squamish United Church or even for myself that I take this so very seriously because it has made me persistent. I can't give up on God's dream for the world. We live in the least religious town in Canada and yet I

still believe God is fully at work here (partly because I believe God doesn't need religion to flourish but that is a whole other thing).

Walter Bruggeman says "A sacred place is where there are deep memories of both great suffering and glad forgiveness and big promises not yet kept but still trusted." We all live on holy ground. We inhabit holy ground and as we become rooted in the dirt of this holy God created place we have the capacity to create the kingdom on earth by creating a community of love, abundance and wellbeing. God's dream.

"Fear is contagious. Fortunately, so is courage. Learning to become fearless will touch everyone around you, and best of all, you'll find it's a gift that keeps on giving."¹ A group of nine of us from Squamish United Church have been working hard in the last few months to discover God's dream for us. Shane Claiborne suggests that it is our job as communities of faith to exegete the world we live in so that we might discover what it means to live out God's dream for our place. We need to study, learn and interpret the place in which we are in to know what God calls us to. That is a key part of the work we have been doing, listening to the heart of our community. Claiborne goes on to suggest we are living in apocalyptic times. Apocalypse (ἀποκάλυψις) is a Greek word meaning "revelation", "an unveiling or unfolding of things not previously known and which could not be known apart from the unveiling". Romans 8:22 says "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now." We have the opportunity to be midwives of this time. It's time to move forward. To unveil our fears and move forward in courage.

There is so much history. There is so much truth that can hold us back but I truly believe that one of the strange gifts of this Covid-19 time is that we have all been stopped in our tracks, we have had to get off the hamster wheel and stop and look around to discover what is truly important. To live and work in an entirely new way. I have an image in my mind of being in a boat pushing the water back with my paddle so that I can move forward. The more people in the boat that push the water back the more forward momentum we will have.

This is an opportunity as the whole world shifts to let go of everything we think we know and tear down the idols we have been as essential and imagine God has pushed the reset button and we get to open a new curtain to see what is being unveiled. The world is not how God created it to be and we have an opportunity to embrace it as God has created it to be and to reveal that to others.

¹ [Michelle Aguilar](#)

See in our parable today the judge thinks he has the authority to not enact justice but the persistent widow know that in fact it is God who has the final say not the judge and so she persists knowing God is always on the side of justice and equality for all. “In her beautifully written memoir on learning to see God all around her, Shannan Martin writes the ‘attentiveness is prayer breathed at the street level.’ I absolutely love this idea, but I also wonder how God might be attentive to us on our streets, longing for us to fit together.”²

We are striving to open our eyes and hearts to the justice and equality that God is calling out in our place. So that we may come to know What is needed in this place so that all might flourish?

Our scripture began with “Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.” Consistent prayer and not loosing heart is work. I can’t say I have it mastered, and I really struggled with it for a time during Covid. I know some don’t like to hear it but I get weary too. Still, I always turn back to prayer and that always brings me back to seeking justice, Jesus, place and equity.

That is why we at Squamish United Church continue to look to the heart of our neighbourhood to discern what God is calling us too. This piece of information is Squamish specific but if you are watching from elsewhere we welcome your prayers joined with ours. As we look at community needs and our mission focus we have begun to embark on a new mission and vision for a Spiritual Wellness Centre for the Sea to Sky corridor. Our initial focus will be on wholeness for children and youth in our community because we have recognized some real gaps. Community leaders and parents agree that a large group of children and youth do not have resources for developing whole supported lives. Our goal will be to help them discover who God has created them to be and whole spiritual beings made in God’s image. We are feeling lead to be a part of building up the children and youth in our community. In time this will expand to families and adults as the spirit leads. There are a whole lot more details to come but I invite you to join me in a persistent prayer for God’s leading to be revealed to us as we seek to follow the Spirit. God is able to do abundantly more than we can ask or imagine and we at this time are being called to be the persistent face of hope, faith and love for all in our place.

Amen.

² Soerens, Tim “Everywhere you Look, Discovering the church right where you are.” pg. 61