

ASKING

Psalms 119: 97-104
Luke 18: 1-8

Faith Community
October 21, 2001

Introduction

Often we learn about something by seeing what it is not. We might call it the "silhouette effect" – the object stands out because the background is the opposite. Advertisers use this technique a lot. "Have you gotten medicines that your children refuse to take because they complain about its bitter taste, the aftertaste it leaves in their mouths, and that it's too hard to swallow? New Asperpop tastes great. It has a rich grape flavor; it's a smooth, light tasting liquid that gently glides down your throat."

Or "Have you spent the whole day waiting at your home because the delivery people told you that they would deliver some time between 8 and 5? You take a day off work. You're confined to your house all day - you can't even leave for a moment because that would be the moment they decide to show up with your delivery. Then, 5 o'clock rolls around and they still aren't there!

We offer you a two-hour window of time when we guarantee we will deliver – we know you have a very busy life and you have better things to do than wait at the house for a delivery.

"More than that, we will even call you 30 minutes before we arrive to let you know just when we will be there. We know your time is important."

Advertisers tell us who they are by showing us what they are not like. It makes an impression. It makes a real difference.

I

This parable of the persistent widow is something like that. A widow goes to a judge with an injustice that has been done to her. Unfortunately she gets a lousy judge, one who "neither fears God nor respects anybody." He doesn't care about the woman or her case. The widow doesn't have anyone else to turn to; she doesn't know anyone important or influential, she has no clout. So she does the only thing she can do - she keeps going back to the judge.

Over and over again she goes to court and pleads her case. The judge tries to ignore her but she just keeps bugging him. Finally he is so worn down that he gives in and grants her justice. It's not that he cares about her; she just keeps annoying him so much that he gives her what she wants just to get rid of her.

Jesus tells us in this parable that God is just the opposite of this uncaring judge. If this one who didn't care about the woman and didn't respect anyone would finally give in and grant her justice, imagine how much more quickly our loving and caring God will act to grant us justice. We don't have to beg with God, we don't have to harass our Creator, we don't have to constantly bang at God's door.

Unlike the judge in the parable God does care about us and about justice. God wants to hear our concerns. So God won't delay, but hear our concerns immediately. Because God cares we don't have to harangue God with our cries for help, God knows what we need before we ask, and is eager to respond to us.

II

Since our God is like this we want to be in constant contact with God. We stay close to One who cares so deeply about us. We talk with God day and night. Sometimes it is conversation as between two close friends. We talk about everything. Little things, big things, routine events, extraordinary happenings.

And we're honest. Even if we don't feel we can say what we think or really feel in everyday life, we can open up completely in everyday conversation with God. Even if we feel we have to wear a mask in dealing with other people, we can take off the mask when we talk with God. It's not as if like we could hide anything from God anyway.

We come to God openly, honestly, directly - we say what we feel to One who cares about us more than we do about ourselves.

III

Sometimes our prayers are short - and said on the run; other times they are longer, well thought our prayers that are carefully worded. Some are prayers of thanks, some are cries, some offer ourselves, some confess, some concern ourselves, some are offered for other people, some are calls for help.

Several years ago my mother and her husband came to visit us. It happened to be a time when there was a special event going on at one of the downtown churches. We went for a good dinner and an interesting program afterward.

On the way home though we had a flat tire on one of the downtown expressways. Not only that, but Ralph and I couldn't get the spare tire loose. It had never been used before, and apparently had rusted in place. So we were there in the dark, by the side of a busy expressway, desperately trying to get this tire changed. Finally we got the tire loose and put it on, and we were on our way.

One of the first things my mother said after we got going was, "I was so frightened, I was praying the whole time you were out there." Later, my wife, Sheila said she wondered how that was possible because my mother was so scared she talked continually while we were changing the tire! It just goes to show you don't have to be speaking to be praying. Even the expression of emotion is a prayer.

The thing is to just keep praying. We constantly try to stay in touch with God. Like everything else in life, we pray fervently for the things we feel most strongly about.

When we are really concerned about homeless people who suffer on the streets of our city, or about our own health, or about a child who is going through a difficult time, we do everything we can - we make an all-out effort. In the same way we tend to pray more passionately for those things we feel so strongly about. It's not that we have to pray harder in order for God to hear, we pray harder because we care so much.

The concerns in life that we feel deeply about we stick with. Those same concerns we keep including in our prayers day after day.

Of course, Jesus doesn't say we will always get what we want. What we ask for has to be what's best - what is in line with God's will.

IV

There is a corollary to all this. If God is attentive, caring, and anxious for a just world, then we need to be about these same qualities ourselves. If we are the people of God, we will act like the One we follow.

That means being attentive to others - especially those who live in deprived circumstances, the one who doesn't know a judge or city council member, who can't get the ear of a public official, the one who can't come to court in a suit because he doesn't own one, and can't afford one.

Because we are children of God we are anxious for this to be a land of equality and a just world. We care about those who are mistreated and those who have been overlooked. We remember those who are forgotten, but not everyone who faces injustice is poor or an outcast. Injustice can be part of everyday life. So the message of this parable affects all parts of our living. It makes a difference in our dealings with people everyday. We constantly ask, "Is this fair?" "Am I being honest?" "Is this agreement just for everyone involved?" If it isn't we need to re-work it.

We ask in international relations and our governmental policy "Is this fair?" "Are people being treated justly?" We also ask those same questions at home, and in our own community.

Conclusion

This simple parable tells us what God is like. It does that by contrasting how God acts with God's opposite. If a corrupt judge who doesn't care about God or the poor and mistreated will eventually act to give them justice because he is continually hounded, how much more quickly and how much more effectively will our loving and just God respond to our prayers?

It's the difference between not caring and caring deeply. It's the contrast between indifference to justice and a passion for justice.

The God we pray to is One who is on our side - who is anxious to hear our prayers and ready to act for what is right, just, and true.

Thank God for that never-ending compassion.

Amen