

NO NAGGING NEEDED

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

Faith Community
October 21, 2007

Introduction

Even in a strong, fair court system like ours, to some degree the justice you get depends on the judge you get. You might say the justice you get depends on the justice you get. Even highly educated, well trained judges have prejudices.

Some may be biased against men with long hair, others against a particular ethnic group or against women. Several years ago a judge in Pittsburgh demanded that a female attorney not use “Ms” before her name. “Are you married?” he asked. She refused to say, asking what relevance that would have on the case. The judge then railed against the designation Ms and insisted that she be referred to as Miss or Mrs. She asked why he wasn’t asking the male attorneys whether they were married. It got into quite a lively exchange; so much so that the transcript appeared in Harper’s Magazine.

Obviously, this judge had issues about women – or at least how to refer to them. Some judges favor a well-dressed business man over a young man in T-shirt and jeans. Some judges take bribes.

I

In Jesus’ parable a widow goes to a judge to get justice for how she has been mistreated. She goes to the judge and pleads her case. In New Testament culture, when a man died, his widow was very vulnerable if she didn’t have a family to come to her defense. Women were less than second class citizens. It was hard for them to defend themselves if they didn’t have family to help them.

This widow tells the judge her story, and he refuses to grant her justice. But she isn’t easily discouraged so she keeps coming back. The judge apparently isn’t the finest representative of his profession; he doesn’t fear God or respect people. This is not the kind of judge you hope to stand before if you ever have to go to court!! One biblical scholar says that the phrase, “did not fear God or respect people,” means that he took bribes. He is, at least, unjust and probably crooked.

But the widow won’t give up. The judge is walking down the halls of the courthouse and he sees her coming toward him. He hurries into the men’s room. But she has seen him so she waits outside the door. “I know you’re in there!” She had that kind of persistence.

Finally the judge is worn down. He doesn’t care about God or people, but he wants this lady off his back, so he grants her justice.

II

Often people try to find specific characters of God in the parables of Jesus. You know, they read the Prodigal Son and think the father represents God. Or they hear the Good Samaritan and think the man who helps represents Jesus.

Obviously, you can't picture the judge in this story as God – just the opposite. The judge doesn't care, God cares profoundly. The judge denies justice, God demands justice. God is at the other end of the spectrum from this judge.

The outcome of the parable is that if this judge – who doesn't care – will grant justice for the widow because she continues to bother him, how much more quickly will God grant justice to us because God does care. If the unjust judge will eventually do what's right for the one harmed, how much more rapidly will God do what's right out of God's passion for fairness.

Even the crooked judge will be fair if you push him hard enough. You don't have to push God at all. That's what God wants.

III

All through the Bible we see how God cares for the abused, the poor, and the put down. The great shining example of this in the Old Testament is the Exodus. People are held in slavery by the Egyptians. God sees their pain and is angry, so he plans for their release. He calls Moses (who doesn't want to do it) to lead his people. Through a long, arduous journey – when half the time the people are begging to go back to Egypt – God leads the people from slavery to freedom.

All through the New Testament Jesus heals the people who are suffering with every kind of affliction: leprosy, blindness, seizures, lameness, deafness. Jesus sees their suffering and acts to make it well.

In his experience with the woman at the well, Jesus talks with a woman, who apparently has a bad reputation, and he breaks every rule of his culture about interactions between men and women. He does all that because he cares about her.

Since biblical times God has called up people to champion justice. God called people in our own history who helped bring an end to slavery. Years later he called a man to fight against prejudice, injustice, and discrimination. Examples of God's caring for the hurting, put down, oppressed and poor are everywhere.

IV

The logical progression from all this is that we too are called to care. Where people are hurting, we are sent to provide relief; where people are hungry, to offer food; where people are abused or misused, to stand up for them.

So you find in every major city or small town, for that matter, a group of Christians who have a soup kitchen or food pantry. Wherever the location there are church people offering help to hurting people. In Detroit every major church has a helping program. Fort Street Presbyterian not only provides food and clothing, but offers showers, blood pressure checks and dental exams. They operate by the words of Jesus: "in as much as you have done it to one of the least of these

my brothers and sisters, you have done it to me.” Places all over the world are trying to fulfill those words of Christ.

Conclusion

God demands justice. We don't have to nag God to act fairly. That is what God is all about. That doesn't mean it's easy though.

When I was in high school, John Mehl, the associate pastor at our church took his vacation time to go with a few other young ministers to the South to register voters. Even though they hadn't done anything illegal, they were arrested and thrown in jail.

The Sunday morning headlines in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette announced that a group of ministers had been arrested. There was an immediate furor. Because my father was the minister of the church, people began calling our home to make threats and calling my father and John Mehl communists.

When John returned, my father asked him to tell about what had happened during the worship service. The congregation supported him, and he stayed in our church.

Those young pastors spoke and acted to bring about justice for people who were mistreated. They had to pay a price for what they did, but they felt the support and care of God through it all.

We don't have to beg God for justice, that's what God wants for all of us. You and I can work with God to bring about the fairness God so passionately wants.

Amen