

Luke 18:1-8 Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart ² He said, "In a certain city, there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. ³ In that city, there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' ⁴ For a while, he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" ⁶ And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? ⁸ I tell you; he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

In some parts of the world, a husband's death brings his widow not only personal grief but also a new life of extraordinary hardship, poverty, powerlessness, and abuse. In Uganda, widowed women can suffer many injustices: They can be forced out of their homes, robbed of everything they own, made to marry a brother-in-law, physically attacked or harmed—even their children can be taken away from them. These offenses stem from traditional Buganda culture, where women would never be able to own or inherit Land. And while the Ugandan Constitution grants equal rights to men and women, people in rural areas continue to take advantage of these women with little fear of consequences. Many of the traditions are very similar to laws found in the OT.

OT law also restricted a woman's rights as a widow. A woman would not be allowed to own land, and if she had no male children, she would become a ward of the tribe, made to marry the next of kin to her husband, often in an attempt to produce offspring in the husband's name. {book of Ruth} It was not a perfect law by any measure. And by US standards, it is downright immoral. It was, and I am by no means trying to defend this horrendous practice, an attempt to take care of the Widow.

Betty Nanozi, a woman who lives in Uganda, was widowed in 2006. She had just given birth to her son, John Paul. When she came home from the hospital, everything she had in the world was gone. Her stepchildren, all adults, had taken everything out of the house. Because of the traditions, even Betty is considered her husband's property. So, whatever she earns, by "tradition," belongs to the clan, and her oldest stepson, a village council member, took everything from her after she began to rebuild.

The "traditions" of the Buganda people have lost the reasons such laws were ever enacted. The ancient Laws have been perverted even further than in OT times. As we see in our Lesson today, taking advantage of a Widow is not new. In fact, as we will see, God is very interested in how His people treat the widow.

The parable that Jesus tells today in the Gospel lesson is unique. Not from our 21st-century ears, but from the POV of those listening in Jesus' day, this parable had some force. To understand Jesus' meaning, one must understand the stereotypical attributes of the Judge and the Widow.

Judge: Purpose: maintain harmonious relations and adjudicate disputes between Israelites. [simple]

Judges were charged with hearing complaints fairly and impartially. This was a sacred duty in that they did not have the benefit of using a jury to determine guilt.

Moses charged Judges: [Deut. 1:16-17] I charged your judges at that time: “Give the members of your community a fair hearing, and judge rightly between one person and another, whether citizen or resident alien. You must not be partial in judging: hear out the small and the great alike; you shall not be intimidated by anyone, for the judgment is God’s. Any case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it.”

Jehoshaphat’s charge: [2 Chr. 19:4-7] [4th king of Judah, the G³ grandson of David] Jehoshaphat resided at Jerusalem; then he went out again among the people, from Beer-sheba to the hill country of Ephraim, and brought them back to the LORD, the God of their ancestors. He appointed judges in the land in all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city, and said to the judges, “Consider what you are doing, for you judge not on behalf of human beings but on the LORD’S behalf; he is with you in giving judgment. Now, let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take care what you do, for there is no perversion of justice with the LORD our God, or partiality, or taking of bribes.”

The position of JUDGE was not to be taken lightly.

Widow: Placed in a position of highest esteem: along with the orphan and alien.

[Duet 24:17-18] You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow’s garment in pledge. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore, I command you to do this.

The idea of causing injustice to someone unable to defend themselves or a stranger in the land was akin to disrespecting God to God’s face. Time and time again in the Torah, God gives this commandment. God’s people, those who call on God’s holy name and claim the blessing of Abraham, are the official spokespeople for God. To be dishonest is an affront to God and pisses God off.

So much so that God will curse anyone who does not follow that commandment.

[Deut. 27:19] “Cursed be anyone who deprives the alien, the orphan, and the widow of justice.” All the people shall say, “Amen!”

By the time of Jesus, the care of the Widow and the orphan was of monumental importance.

[Jas 1:27] If any think they are religious and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

But the Widow was even more special because of their devotion and piety.

[1 Tim 5:5] The real widow, left alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. [Luke tells us the story of Anna the Prophetess in the temple]

These are the stereotypes of the Widow and Judge, as they were understood by the people to whom Jesus was speaking. So, when Jesus starts to tell this parable, something immediately catches the attention of those listening, or at least it should.

The Judge *neither feared God nor had respect for people*, and the Widow *kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.'* This is a 180° flip of each of the stereotypes. This Judge, entrusted with the well-being of his tribe, disregards one of his constituents for reasons we are not told. [I get the same vibe reading this I get when I read about modern politicians]

For whatever reason, the widow will not take no for an answer. She is not just waiting for God to bring her justice; she takes an active role in her well-being. I think many Christians and congregations could take a lesson from this Widow; God will take care of you, but sometimes that requires using God's gifts to do it yourself.

A few years back, there was a country song, "*Jesus Take the Wheel*;" I never understood why someone would think it was a good religious song. It is about a young woman who has not been living her life "right" and is almost in a car wreck. The chorus goes:

Jesus, take the wheel
Take it from my hands
'Cause I can't do this on my own
I'm letting go
So, give me one more chance
And save me from this road I'm on
Jesus, take the wheel.

The idea of repentance in the song is lovely, but the execution of the concept is all wrong. This Song gives the impression that to walk, or in this case drive, with God, one must take a passive position in the journey. [**LET GO AND LET GOD**] I promise you that if you take a passive role in your driving, you will meet Jesus sooner rather than later.

Today's lesson says the exact opposite of that song. If one reads the bible, one will see that God is active when his people are active. We say, "something is happening," when we look around the Christian world and see a church growing and reaching out into a community. People will say God is at work in that church, but I will bet money that God isn't the only one working. Like our Widow, those growing churches have Members who visit the sick. They have planned meals, planned fellowship, and read their bibles, individually and as groups. They pray together, and they plan together. In this business, we call it discerning God's will.

Betty Nanozi didn't take her circumstance in life and just lay down and die. She fought back. With the help of attorneys, social workers, and criminal investigators, Betty gained ownership of her house and land and made a life for herself and her son. Her oldest stepson was criminally prosecuted, and her story inspired others in her country to begin to fight for their rights as widows.

The judge in this story didn't fear God, but he was fearful of the widow. In my original Greek translation work, I found the word *Hupōpiazō*. In English, it is translated as "wear" in the phrase "wear me out." But the Greek word has more of an emphatic definition. Its literal translation is **to slap**. The judge says he will grant the widow justice because he fears she will physically harm him. The Widow is a woman of action, just like God is a God of action.

Jesus ends the parable, ⁶ And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? ⁸ I tell you; he will quickly grant justice to them. **And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"**

FAITH. Will Jesus find faith on earth upon his return? Will he see people with the constitution of this Widow? Will his chosen people actively pursue justice for the widows, orphans, and aliens? Will they be active or passive in their faith?

Today I ask you to contemplate this parable. I believe that Jesus is talking to the PC(USA) today. I believe Jesus is talking to LHPC today. I believe Jesus is talking to me today. What do you think? Is Jesus speaking to you? How are you actively pursuing justice? What kind of Justice is it? Whose Justice? Seriously ask yourself this question. If Jesus walked through those doors right now, could any of us justify our actions on behalf of God's plan or the building of God's kingdom? If you can, then bravo, you and I should write a book together.

If you can't, for whatever reason you are telling yourself right now, I want you to ask yourself, why? Why have I not sought justice with my giving, voting, and conversations? And then ask God, "what can I do to be more like the widow and less like the judge?" "How can I live a more faithful life? Let us pray.

Faithful and loving God, thank you for the ability to read the witness we call the Bible. Thank you for showing us that living a life of faith is an action-filled life. Lord, we feel closer to you when we do your work in the world. We ask that your Spirit be a reminder of that revelation as we continue to contemplate the widow's actions this coming week. Show us ways we can follow her example today, tomorrow, and in the weeks to come. In the name of our Savoir, Teacher, and Friend, Jesus Christ. AMEN.