

## **Pastor Mollie's Sermon**

**October 20, 2019**

**Luke 18:1-8**

Being the parent of 3, 6 year olds, Dave and I are finding that days can be difficult.

The boys can be busy little guys, exerting their independence while also trying to learn where their boundaries are.

As we are trying to figure out where we are as parents, this can lead to some... Well... Challenges.

It is during those challenges, that we find ourselves walking a fine line between being a loving and supportive parent vs. hard-nosed judge.

This fine line is a balance between allowing them to make decisions on their own versus laying down the law.

At times, we are met with exhaustion and at times, there doesn't seem to be a right answer.

With so many parenting books out there encouraging us on both sides of that fine line, it seems to be that parenting isn't a perfect science.

There are extremes of parenting - from helicopter parent to freely-affirming parent.

But the extremes are not limited to just parenting - they can be found in many areas of our lives: Financially.

Emotionally.

Spiritually.

It is these extremes that we find in our Gospel reading for today.

Jesus tells one of his many parables to the disciples to speak of their fervor for the newly established ministry taking place.

It will be difficult - there will be many doubters - and it is to these doubters to which the parable speaks.

While encouraging them to "not lose heart", he tells the story of two people: a judge and a widow.

These two become entwined in a dance of sorts, with the vulnerable widow persistently asking for the judge to show justice against her oppressor.

It is this "hard-nosed judge that grants her the favorable verdict **SO THAT SHE WOULD LEAVE HIM ALONE.**

I don't know about you, but this doesn't sound like the best way to conduct cases in the justice system...

While this story from Luke is most certainly a commending of our contending with God, it is important to acknowledge the specificity of the widow's request.

She asks for justice, which stands in stark contrast to the judge who has no fear of God and no respect for the other.

In this contrast, a definition of justice comes into view.

Being "just" means behaving according to what is morally right and fair.

Therefore, for Luke, then, justice means behaving accordingly by fearing God **AND** having respect for others.

Two extremes that can seem to be diametrically opposed.

If this definition (of justice) were actually at work in our world here and now, I suspect our world would be a rather different place.

Simply stated: Fear God. Respect others.

Let's pause for a minute and consider that if acts of justice were judged by these two criteria alone, we might reconsider just how just we really are.

Fear God. Respect others.

But how do we define "fear"?

There can be so much we can be "fearful" of in today's society.

But "fearing God" is a different kind of fear.

To fear God is to be able to become seemingly nervous about all that God can do and has done in our lives.

To fear God is to stand in awe.

To fear God is to live in the mystery and magnitude of all God can do in our lives.

Luther Seminary professor Karoline Lewis had a powerful response to our text for today. In her commentary she writes:

“Is there any fear of God left? Or have we so tamed the Almighty so that God is a mere aspect of our lives rather than the one who makes sense of our lives?”

Is there any fear of God left? Or have we insisted that in order to preach or do theology, we need to have God all figured out? “It is not the task of Christianity to provide easy answers to every question, but to make us progressively aware of a mystery. God is not so much the object of our knowledge as the cause of our wonder” (Kallistos Ware).

Is there any fear of God left? Or have we decided that to fear God is a rather archaic phrase best left in the recesses of the Old Testament and certainly not binding on our lives now?

And, is there any respect left for the other? Or have we totally bought into the binaries of our society -- that the other can only exist as our opposite?

Is there any respect left for the other? Or has fear completely crushed our compassion?

Dr. Lewis outright names what fearing God and respecting others have become in our own communities.

What Dr. Lewis claims is direct and straightforward and perhaps a little hard to hear, but no one said practicing justice would ever be easy. **PAUSE!**

This text is best seen in action in a segment that aired on a CBS Sunday Morning television show earlier this year.

*On the Road with Steve Hartman* tells this story:

### **VIDEO CLIP**

When people view God as judge, it limits their perception of what a judge can do and be, as if the walls are closing in.

If people are able to, instead, see God as grace and forgiveness, as the judge in the clip, then the proverbial walls around our lives can disappear.

The beginning of justice, according to Jesus, is when we show our awe for God by respecting those around us,

by granting them a measure of dignity, by being willing to view them as fellow children of God who are worthy of our respect and fair treatment.

Like the unjust judge in today’s parable, God hears our requests.

UNlike the unjust judge, God doesn’t just give in and allow us to have anything and everything we have always wanted.

All that we receive - what we most NEED - is not always what we most want.

That is at least part of what Jesus is teaching his disciples, and us, in this parable.

The early church, which first read it, certainly prayed for many things it did not receive: safety, protection from persecution, just to name a few.

What the early church DID receive was what it most needed: a sense of God's loving presence and attentiveness, and the strength and resilience and fortitude it needed to survive.

We need to count on God to come down on the side of justice.

We need to count on God to hear the ones who have no power, no influence, no voice.

We need to count on God to hear those who have nowhere else to turn.

We need to count on God to not always grant our requests, but to hear, with loving, parental patience, the persistent prayers of our hearts.

AMEN