

Jeremiah 31:27-34

Psalm 119:97-104

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Luke 18:1-8

Role reversal- in the relationship between God and humanity, suppose God was the persistent widow and we were the unjust judge with the hard heart and no respect for God or for his fellow man. How would the meaning of this parable be changed. God pursues relentlessly. Day and night. Without flagging. Without getting discouraged. Without abandoning the cause because he seeks justice and he seeks justice from us. We know that God is not like the unjust judge. We know that God does not turn his back on us the way the unjust judge turned his back on the pleading woman. But what if the roles were reversed?

Unanswered prayer. Will there be anyone with faith left when Jesus returns? Or will we give up and give out? If our prayers are not answered the way we think they should be, will we eventually turn away from God?

Her persistence and call for justice is such that the judge characterizes her actions as those of a boxer. It is difficult to discern this boxing image in the NRSV, which translates the judge's words as follows: "because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming" (verse 5). In the original Greek, though, the judge says: "because this widow causes trouble for me, I will give her justice, so that she may not, in the end, give me a black eye by her coming" (verse 5). By using the verb *hypopiazo*, which means "to give a black eye," Luke situates the judge's language within the arena of boxing metaphors. (See also Paul's use of the verb *hypopiazo* in 1 Corinthians 9:26-27.) However, when English translations do not capture the meaning of this verb, they soften the tenacity of the widow's actions, as well as her perceived status as a "trouble-maker" to the system.

God is in fact *not* like this reluctantly responsive judge.³ God does not need to be badgered into listening, and when God does respond, God does so willingly. If anything, God is more like the widow in her own relentless commitment to justice.⁴

By ending on a question of whether he will find faith at his return, Jesus raises a number of additional questions for us. How do followers not lose heart and maintain the faith in light of the fact that Jesus is not returning as soon as many would like? How are we to act if God's justice is not delivered according to our own timetable? How do we go on in the face of injustice if God's ultimate justice only arrives "suddenly" (*en tachei*) at Jesus' return? We are not to wait quietly for Jesus' return and accept our fates in an oppression-ridden world.

Like all black eyes, the one the widow's complaints threaten to inflict have a double effect, representing both physical and social distress. That is, the judge complains that the widow's relentless badgering not only causes him physical harm but also risks publically embarrassing him. For this reason, he says -- perhaps justifying his actions to his wounded sense of self? -- that he relents not because he has changed his mind but simply to shut up this dangerous widow. In this case, insolent, obnoxious, even intolerable behavior results in justice.

Read this way, the parable serves to encourage those suffering injustice to continue their complaints and calls for justice. A sermon following this path will encourage believers in their efforts, noting that sometimes it takes extreme, even socially unacceptable behavior to effect change. God, the Bible has persistently insisted, gives special attention to those who are most vulnerable; therefore, we should persist in our complaints, even to the point of embarrassing the powers that be in order to induce change.

Begins with the Lord's Prayer and instruction on praying. Ends with a question about will faith be sustained if Jesus' return is delayed. God commends those who hold onto their faith in dire circumstances or profess a belief when logic would steer them elsewhere.

- the centurion who believes Jesus will heal his slave, even from a distance;
- the sinful woman who anoints Jesus' feet and loves much;
- friends of the paralytic who are willing to dig through a roof;
- the bleeding, unclean woman who touches Jesus' clothes in the crowd and is healed;
- the Samaritan leper, whose gratitude turns him back to Jesus where he falls at his feet in thanksgiving;
- and the blind beggar later in this chapter who sees Jesus for who he is and calls to him.

So a beginning of the answer to the question appears to be that the Son of Man will find faith, but it may be in unexpected places, as it has been in the Gospel -- not among the religious professionals or the ones certain of their own righteousness, but among the outsiders, the unlovely, the unclean, the ones certain of their sinfulness.