

Seeking Justice in an Unjust World (by Robert Griffin)
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As a young Baptist preacher in my home town of Troy, AL, I say younger as I prepare to turn 40 next week. I recall trying out for this church once that had an open pulpit. Back in those days one was expected to preach without notes, but at that time I was really not in the habit of preaching without notes. I really wanted to impress this congregation with my youthful knowledge, so I decided to tape my notes to the inside of my suit jacket.

So worship began, there was the opening hymn, sung 5 times, opening prayer lasting 20 minutes, and on. Finally it was time for me to get up and preach.

I start by saying, "Brothers and sisters the first mythical couple in the bible name was, and I pull open the right side of my jacket and said, Adam and Eva." Then I preached on Adam and Eva for awhile.

I continued on by saying "Brothers and sisters the name of the man who built the arks name was, and I pulled open the left side of my jacket and said, Noah." So I preached on Noah for awhile.

Time has moved on, I'm all into my preaching, and I did not notice that my note cards that I had tape to various parts of my suit had fallen to the floor.

So all into my sermon, I shouted, "Brothers and sisters the man who the bible says was after God's own heart was, and I pulled back my coat and said, JC Penny!".

We live in a world where we expect quick answers, like the show Jeopardy on television, where the contestant has to answer the question before the buzzer sounds. Or like with email, where email etiquette says one should answer an email with 24 hours of receiving it. Within reason, all phone calls should be returned within 2 business days. It is a fast pace world and we want quicker and quicker responses. And what I've noticed is that even though we now have the technology to respond on a moment's notice, the human side still is the main factor in this equation.

In this same line, prayer is not the kind of activity from which one should expect instant gratification. We are told in Christian scripture that Jesus sometimes prayed all night. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed three times. We have been given model prayers down through the centuries. So prayer of some sort or fashion is not an unusual phenomenon.

Luke's reading for today is about the dishonest judge with the comment concerning what Jesus was trying to teach through his parable, the "need to pray and not lose heart." We are encouraged to pray and not give up, give in or give out. Said another way, we are to be persistent, precise and passionate in our affirmations and contemplations.

Persistence in prayer doesn't mean we get what want. It is not a matter of praying hard enough or long enough. It simply means that we are conscious of our desires and what is good and healthy and wholesome for us is worthy to be included in our prayers and those prayers will be more likely to yield satisfactory results if they are accompanied with persistence, precision and with passion.

Our reading gives good pointers today about prayer and there are three points I would like to highlight.

One, be persistent in your prayer life.

Two, be Precise in our prayer life.

Finally, be Passionate in your prayer life.

The unnamed widow in this parable had justice on her side but that didn't seem to make any difference to the unjust judge. The widow had no money, no power or status, but she was not helpless.

We do not know if this woman-character was based on a real person, but it was not uncommon in that day for a widow to have an adversary who would attempt to take advantage of her or anyone with lesser privilege. She may not have had any family, and a lone woman in those days was pretty defenseless. Someone may have been trying to get her money, or to cheat her out of her land. Sexism, power and class are three of the identifiable barriers that we can identify what this particular woman was up against.

In any case, she had a problem, and she was before this judge. The judge, the interpreter of the law, was her only hope. So she came, saying "I am being mistreated! I want justice! Help Me! The judge refused to hear her petition, her request; she was talking, it seemed, to a brick wall.

We are told that this was a man who **neither feared God nor cared about anyone else**. It seems that he was very secure in his position and in his authority because he did not care what people said. It would stand to reason that this judge, was probably not Jewish since the Jews had a holy respect and fear for God.

Anyone that presented before him, came in fear unless they had a bribe, or great power and influence. But this widow came with nothing to offer other than a demand for justice. And when judge did not act, she came again. "I am being mistreated! I want justice! Help Me!" Still, there were no results. But did she stop? She only came again, and again saying, "I am being mistreated! I want justice! Help Me." She had a cause, and she cried out, persistently. When it didn't work, she tried again. When it seemed to fail, she tried again. It might never have worked, but it would not be for lack of trying on her part. Again and again she came and would continue to come affirming her right to be heard and insisting that her dignity be recognized. "I want justice! Help me!"

And the judge, though hard and unfair, finally relented. He might have given her justice for a price, but she had no bribe. The judge did not fear God, so he had no moral pressure from conscience to help her. He wasn't Jewish, so why should he do anything for this

poor Jewish widow? What could she do for him? She could neither threaten nor bribe him, but she could know the truth of her innate value and she could lift her voice on her own behalf and refuse to give up.

Now, don't get confused...the judge isn't God. The point of the story isn't to describe the character of a far removed god...the point is to explain the power of persistent prayer. God isn't outside of us, granting us favors sometimes and refusing us at other times. The story isn't about God's character, its about the character of one who is determined to learn how to pray more effectively. I'll affirm my value and affirm my value and affirm my value until my affirmation is made manifest in my experience!
Persistent prayer is overcoming prayer. We need persistence; we must never quit.

The second example this morning about prayer is to be Precise

The woman had a definite request. She knew what she wanted and presented her petition to the judge. Today when someone goes to court in a lawsuit, they have to have specific and definite requests for damages. To go to court with only vague ideas about what someone has done to you and what you want the court to do about it is sheer folly.

Too often we are vague in our praying. "O God, bless me. Help me to live right. Help me to be what you want me to be." We pray this way many times without ever asking God what blessing the Divine would like for us to claim as our own; or what can we do to affirm a better life for ourselves; or what the Divine would have us grow into.

Specific praying can revolutionize our prayer life. When we start praying specifically, Our Source begins to bless us with specific answers to our prayers. Nebulous prayers get nebulous answers; specific thoughts and affirmations lead to specific results.

When we pray specifically, we receive specific answers to our prayers. And that confirms that Our Source has responded to our consciousness, which in turn gets us excited about prayer and builds our faith in something that is both greater than ourselves and of which we are actually a part!

And then other people get excited about what is going on in our lives, prayer becomes an exciting adventure of faith for us.

But how many of us have specific goals that we pray for with the expectation that we will receive a response. This widow had a goal, and she was persistent in specific petition until she got through. Not only did she not stop praying, she didn't stop being clear about what she was praying for. The unknown heroine of this story becomes our model of what it means to be persistent and precise with the Universe.

The third example about prayer is to be Passionate in Prayer

This widow was passionate about her request. She cared what happened, and she cried unto the judge like she cared. Listen to me, grant me justice! Grant me justice!"

Continually she called to him. She cared, so she cried out with her whole heart. Not only did she not give up and not only was she clear about what she wanted, but she also believed with her whole heart that what she was asking for was good...she wanted it whole-heartedly and she really believed that she deserved it. Her passion added power to her prayer.

When we believe in something passionately, the need can move us. What moves you? Perhaps you are facing a difficult problem and you can't seem to find the solution. Perhaps you just receive a second opinion about a medical diagnosis and feel like that is it – there are no more options. Perhaps you have just lost your job and are wondering how you are going to pay your bills. Perhaps a relationship or friendship has ended badly and you are struggling to find a way to make reconciliation a reality. But like the woman of our story we are encouraged not to give up. Our needs move us to seek out a response to our situation and only we can alter our course and we can with persistence, precision and passion.

Scripture tells us that that "the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."

Some of you may say, "I'm not really passionate about anything in prayer. How do I become passionate?" We become passionate when we catch God's vision for our lives. We become passionate when we refuse to settle for the status quo.

We become persistent when we stand with the Prophet Amos and do our part in helping "justice to roll down like waters and righteous lie an ever-flowing stream." (Amos 5.24)

We act with precision when we join our consciousness with the Prophet Jeremiah and do our part in declaring in an unjust, "act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed." (Jeremiah 22.3)

We act with passion when we walk in faith with the Prophet Ezekiel who said, "Enough ... put away your violence and oppression, and do what is just and right." (Ezekiel 45.9)

And finally when our lives are centered with persistence, precision and passion we can act upon what the Prophet Micah ask of us "...do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6.8)

Our reading goes on to say that God will certainly grant justice to the oppressed, marginalized, disenfranchised, and those who cry out for justice. It may not come as quickly as it did for the fictional woman in our story today, but it will come. Justice may not come in our lifetime, but it will come. The worst thing that the people of God can do is to give up making our appeal for justice.

And let us not forget the passion of an unknown woman. Let us do our part to bring about a just community and world. Amen.