

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

The argument of reasonableness is, if this judge can grant justice, then surely God will also. Luke appears to say that we need to be like the widow and persist in hope and prayer. Read this way, God is just a little too much like the judge: not really caring enough to respond straight away, but needing to be irritated by much human effort in prayer before relenting.

In the opening chapters of Luke's Gospel, the faithful (elect ones) are those who were yearning for the redemption of Israel. It is a political yearning, but much bigger than that. It is the cry for justice, for peace, for the establishment of God's rule in the world. It is the cry: 'Your kingdom come!'

It is missing the mark if we treat the passage as a general teaching about intercessory prayer. It is primarily about a yearning for change. The widow represents poverty and vulnerability, which is the point of the parable's message. The story has been shaped in the cruelty of exploitation, the arbitrary abuse of power and the wounds of the people.

Does a God exist who cares? The paralysis of hope can occur at many levels. For many it plummeted with the towers of the World Trade Centre. Faith then retreats into survival mode or fences itself within petty concerns, loses its political and social edge in a sweet jellied peace of mind, or surrenders to the demagogues and demigods of hate. *(adapted from Bill Loader's commentary)*

## **COCU61C Readings**

The theme running through the readings is that of God's word written on the heart (Jeremiah), offering guidance and life (Psalm 119), as the basis for teaching and the Christ-following life (2 Timothy), and expressed in the parables of Jesus. God comes to people to bring justice, and as the Christ who will return (in Jesus' musings at the end of the Luke passage).

We long for God and seek God's presence, God's justice and God's protection. As well, God longs to come to us, offering us guidance and life through God's word, God's law, written on our hearts. In prayer we express our longing, and we open ourselves to God's presence and purpose. As we pray, God's word is truly written on our hearts, and the God of justice breaks into our human experience with justice, life and divine principles for full and meaningful living. The power of this theme of prayer as the meeting place for God and people is that it is not just the pray-er that is changed by the encounter, but the world in which the pray-er then lives and acts out the prayer each day.

In the practical world of justice-bringing, prayer can feel like a rather impractical and ineffectual pursuit. If we seek to bring pressure to bear on leaders or groups with whom we disagree through prayer, in the hopes that God will somehow swoop in and bring about the changes we pray for, then we are little more than delusional, and our prayer is indeed impractical and ineffectual. If, however, we seek to be changed by God's coming to us as judge, challenger and guide, if we seek to open our hearts in order that God's law may be written on them, and we can live the justice we seek to bring, then our prayer is a powerful, transformative act. In this sense, no work of justice is complete without prayer.

*(John van de Laar, Sacredise)*

It is our role to be with people in the midst of pain. It means being in touch with the struggles, with the poverty, with all that makes people cry out in our world. It also means living with the affirmation of a God who cares, even though, unlike the promise of Luke 18:8, the solution does not come speedily. In that sense we are to be building supportive communities where people can sustain the crying day and night and not lose heart, where we do not tune out, but live in hope and with a sense of trust that does not make us feel we have to carry the whole world on our shoulders. For facing the pain of the world is, indeed, a crushing experience which most of us cannot bear and which, without support and acceptance of our own limitations, we will inevitably either deny or ourselves become part of the hopelessness. We are not alone; faith and hope are possible.

*(Bill Loader's Commentary)*

**Psalm 119:97-104** *A song of rejoicing in God's laws and instructions and the way they guide and lead to life.*

Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all day long.

Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies,

**for it is always with me.**

I have more understanding than all my teachers,

**for your decrees are my meditation.**

I understand more than the aged,

**for I keep your precepts.**

I hold back my feet from every evil way,

**in order to keep your word.**

I do not turn away from your ordinances,

**for you have taught me.**

How sweet are your words to my taste,

**sweeter than honey to my mouth!**

Through your precepts I get understanding;

**therefore I hate every false way.**

**Jeremiah 31:27-34** *A prophecy of restoration, of an end to generational curses, and of God's new covenant with God's people - written on hearts, not stone. The promise of a 'new covenant' in this passage is familiar to us, but these words were for a devastated people yearning for restoration, perhaps even in their lifetimes.*

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of humans and the seed of animals. And just as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the Lord. In those days they shall no longer say: "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge. The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt - a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,

says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

God gave Jeremiah a six-fold task, to "pluck up and pull down," to "destroy and overthrow," and "to build and to plant." He has spent most of his prophetic career announcing the former 4 demands, but now attends to the latter two. Israel will no longer have to suffer as a result of the sins of their ancestors; they will now be judged only on their own behaviors. God is about to create a new covenant with them - not a simple reiteration of the old covenant, because they have broken that ancient bond even though God was their "husband" - the word is *baal*, which can also mean "master" or "lord." And, of course, it is the name of the Canaanite storm god, to whom Israel often turned for help throughout their history. Jeremiah says that only YHWH is baal of Israel.

**2 Timothy 3:14-4:5:** *Paul encourages Timothy, in the name of the coming Christ, to remain faithful to the Scriptures and to teach God's message faithfully at all times.*

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.