

## “God Grants Justice”

Luke 18:1-8

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Jesus is such a good teacher! He is also a good theologian. He knows the mind of God! Sometimes, to make his point perfectly clear, he paints a word picture of the exact opposite! In this case, he tells a story about a judge who delights in delaying the granting of justice and grants it only after being badgered by a certain woman the judge finds annoying. It's quite a dramatic picture Jesus paints with words. We can imagine this judge rolling his eyeballs backward, checking his calendar for his next tee time at the golf club, and whispering something about this justice seeker who won't leave him alone!

What Jesus wants the church to know is that God is the exact opposite. God hears every cry for justice, and God responds with compassion without delay. This parable hints at the very nature of God: a lover of justice.

I am deeply moved by the scene with Moses at the burning bush. God gets Moses' attention and then declares, “I have observed the misery of my people. I have heard their cry. They live in bondage. They long to be set free.”

I am just as deeply moved by the Prophet Isaiah who declares, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, and to proclaim liberty to the captives.” Isaiah feels called by God to do the work of justice and to call his community to join him in this sacred work.

In the lesson for today, we are not told the precise nature of the justice the woman seeks, only that she is persistent in seeking it.

Justice means different things to different people. At the risk of over-simplifying the Biblical perspective, I would say that justice is done when people gain access to the basics of life: freedom, education, shelter, health care, safety, food, friendship, love. Injustice is the denial of access to these basics of life. Whenever anyone is denied access to the basics of life and cries out to God, God hears that cry and looks for ways to open doors.

One of my core beliefs is that God looks to churches to be door openers; to be doers of justice.

This principle of Biblical justice was operative when we imaged our new building. The former building's connectors and stairwells and ramps created barriers to folks in wheelchairs, to people with canes or walkers, to anyone challenged by stairs. One can walk through this building now and say, "What lovely, generous spaces!" Or one can walk through and say, "This building is an embodiment of justice. Everyone has access to every nook and cranny with the sole exception of the choir loft!

One of the more pressing justice concerns of our day is the shortage of affordable housing. Too many families simply don't have access to a house or an apartment that fits their budget. Mention 'affordable housing' in certain social circles, and the room becomes mysteriously silent. God bless Millard Fuller, the founder of Habitat for Humanity. This man of faith had a vision that everyone on the face of the earth deserves a decent dwelling place. For him, it was a justice issue. For everyone who swings a hammer or saws a board or measures a piece of sheetrock, it is a justice issue: providing access to one of the basics of life.

In the 1960's, Glastonbury saw the creation of the Inter-Faith Housing Corporation. Several churches working together found a way to construct what we know as Naubuc Green, an affordable place to live on Welles Street. I've been talking with a number of people who hope to rekindle the conversation and to renew the vision to generate much more housing that is both descent and affordable. This would be another example of Biblical justice. For there are people crying out for a simple place to live in our town. God does hear that cry. God is looking around for door openers!

Justice happens on a macro-scale and also on a micro-scale; on the world stage and on the tiniest stage. Wherever somebody gains access to one of the basics of life, justice has been served.

Jesus understood this. He asks us to understand it, too. On our recent mission trip to Malawi, we witnessed an act of justice unfold before our eyes. We were walking through a village in the Chezi area near the orphanage South Church supports. We came upon an elderly woman using a heavy axe to chop away at an old tree stump. She was determined to bring home some firewood to cook supper for her family. We could see that the stump was resisting mightily her feeble swings. It was going to be hours before that stump gave way to her need for firewood. I took the axe in my hand and made a few feeble swings of my own. Then, I noticed a young fellow coming towards us. I simply invited him to help this woman gain access to a little firewood. He took that axe and with about three swings accomplished the task! He opened the door for her! He made it possible for her to start her fire and to cook her supper. He did an act of justice. Perhaps, one day he'll think to plant some more trees, to work for a longer term solution to the energy needs of that region. But for that day, for that woman, justice was done. That night, her family ate a hot meal.

As we covenant again today to be the church of Jesus Christ, we covenant to be an instrument of God's justice in the world. We covenant to be door openers. We covenant to become conscious of places where access is denied. We covenant to see what we can do to grant access to the basics of life. And when we do this work of justice together, we find we are all living in the greatest of hope.  
Amen