

Jesus tells a parable about the need to pray always and not to lose heart. This is a complex story of a court room drama where there is a complete imbalance of power between a widow, her opponent, and a judge.

The widow is understood to be completely powerless. She has an opponent who has wronged her in some way that prompts her to become relentless in pleading her case before a judge. She finds her voice, she gathers up the courage, and she demands justice for herself.

But the challenge is she is before a judge who has no respect for people, no belief in God, and no desire for justice at all. It is far from an ideal situation. The judge's main goal is that she stop bothering him lest he get worn out. He just wants her gone. The judge has no concern for her welfare, and we don't even know what granting justice looks like for her.



Jesus says, “Listen to what the unjust judge says.” The judge says “because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.” May she be gone. May her voice be silenced.

Remember, the story *begins* by saying that the purpose of this story is about the need to pray always and not lose heart.

It *ends* with the idea that God *will* grant justice to his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night. “And, yet,” Jesus asks at the very end, “when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

If the unjust judge, who grants justice, is meant to be a contrast to God, who also grants justice quickly, then what kind of God do we have faith in? Faith in a God, who like an unjust judge, wants to silence our voices by sending us away? Or is there something else we are called to have faith in?

What is most tragic about the story is that the widow has no advocate or ally to plead her case. She is all alone. And she is perceived to be an irritation who needs to be dealt with.

Generally speaking, you cannot speak about justice without also speaking about mercy. There is in this story a strange interplay between elements of justice and mercy; advocacy and faith.

Perhaps a relentless begging God for justice for ourselves might not always generate the outcome we hope for or anticipate. God's justice, granted quickly, might leave us out in the cold. God's justice might actually bring us down a notch or two.

The recurring request to Jesus in the gospels, is always, "Lord, have mercy upon us." In the liturgies of the church, it is clear that the language of our prayers focus more on asking God for *mercy* rather than justice. There is a recognition and reminder that God's *mercy* will always restore us and lift us up out of despair to unexpected places of honour. But God's justice is something that you don't necessarily want to be the recipient of. Justice is always sought on behalf of others who have no voice. Friends lower the paralytic down through the roof because he can't reach Jesus on his own. A father pleads on behalf of the daughter who is ill. A mother

pleads on behalf of wedding hosts who are about to run out of wine.

And where you expect justice to be issued quickly, Jesus cries from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." It is a prayer for mercy, not for justice.

The days are surely coming when God establishes a new covenant: a covenant of mercy. So our teeth are no longer set on edge.

Remember Mary's great song of praise, the Magnificat. She sings about a God who scatters the proud, brings down the mighty, and sends the rich away empty. She sings about a God who lifts up the lowly, fills the hungry with good things and exalts the humble and meek. She sings about a God whose mercy is on them that fear him for all generations. Her song points to her son who will fulfill the new covenant by becoming the target to absorb all the injustices of the world on himself; by becoming the one who has no voice; and instead of revenge or retaliation offers the liberating gift of mercy so we may not be driven away or diminished, but welcomed in and lifted up. *This* is where we place our faith, and this is why we do not lose heart.