

Sermon for Sunday, October 16, 2016
St James Episcopal Church, St James NY
The Very Rev. Canon Dr. Raewynne J. Whiteley

One of the things
about the gospel according to St Luke
is that Luke seems to like stories
that the other gospel writers don't think
are important enough to include,
and Luke especially seems to like
the more obscure stories and parables
that Jesus told.
And today's
is no exception.

Jesus says to his disciples,
"Once upon a time,
there was a judge
who was determined
to do his own thing.
He didn't care about God
or about anyone else.
Who knows why anyone
ever thought he would be a good judge,
but there he was.

And there was a widow
who had been in a lawsuit for just about forever.
Most people thought
she was wasting her time.
After all, she was just a woman.
Her witness
didn't count for anything,
the way the law saw it:
women weren't valid witnesses in a court of law.
Even a sympathetic judge
would have been hard pressed
to rule in her favor.
And this judge

was hardly likely
to be sympathetic.
But the widow
was convinced of the justice of her claim.
So day after day, week after week,
she would be there
on his doorstep,
putting her case.
The first day
he closed the door in her face.
And the second.
And the third.
And so it went on.

His neighbors began to complain.
Having this woman
constantly hanging around
was annoying,
and they were getting sick
of her shouting.
But the judge ignored them.
Not his problem.

But then he began to notice
that fewer and fewer clients
were coming to him.
And when he asked around,
he discovered that
the widow
was giving him a bad
reputation.
Plus no one wanted
to have to push past her
to get into his office.
If he could even hear them knock
over her shouts.

And so
one day
he decided

that it would be easier
to just do what she said
than have her keep on bothering him.”

It’s a strange sort of story, isn’t it?
Especially when Jesus
begins comparing God
to the judge.
And the temptation,
as it always is in a parable,
to identify God with the judge,
and us with the widow,
and come up
with a nice moral ending.

But of course,
this story
defies that sort of comparison.
Because if we simply allocate roles,
we end up with God as
untrustworthy
unresponsive, and
unscrupulous

Do we really want a God
who simply capitulates to us
to shut us up?

But of course,
Jesus doesn’t make that simple identification.
Because this is a backwards parable.
This time
God is not like
the judge.
God is not untrustworthy
God is not unresponsive, and
God is not unscrupulous.

Which is all very well, but why does Jesus think it is so important
to say this?

What question
is he answering?

The answer to that
is in the previous chapter.

In Chapter 17 of the gospel according to St Luke,
the Pharisees ask Jesus
when is the kingdom of God coming?
When will we see
God's rule on earth?

And Jesus' answer?
It's not coming
in a way
that most people will identify.
There won't be obvious signs.
In fact,
it's already here - and you haven't even noticed!

But then he turns to the disciples
and seems to say almost the opposite.
He says to them,
"The time is coming
when you'll long to see visible signs
of the kingdom of God.
You'll be looking,
and people will tell you
that this thing or that thing
proves that God is going to do something dramatic.
But don't be taken in.
Because when God does something
there won't be
a lot of warnings.
It will happen suddenly.
So be prepared."

And that's when
he tells today's parable.

You see,
there's always a tension
in the way Jesus talks
about the kingdom of God.
It's both here now
and still to come.
God is at work now, in a way that's almost unseen,
there in the background;
but God will do way more dramatic things
some time in the future.
We live
in that in between time,
where God is at work quietly,
but where we wait for God's
more dramatic intervention.

And Jesus knows
that the obvious question for is
"So what does that mean for us?"

And his answer?
Our parable today.

Because we live
in the in between time.
We know that God is active around us,
but we long for the time
when all creation is renewed,
when sorrow and pain are no more,
and when justice and peace
are here for all.

And we pray, we pray
our deepest yearnings and hopes.

But sometimes
it feels like we are bashing our heads against a wall.
We pray and pray and pray
but God seems to be silent.
Why doesn't God act

now?

Jesus' response is
the parable.
God is NOT
like the unjust judge.
God isn't capricious,
granting requests on a whim.
God isn't selfish,
caring only for his own interests.
God isn't ignoring us.
And God doesn't demand
that we beat our heads against the wall.

God does hear us,
God does hear
and God responds.
But often
not in the dramatic,
visible
ways that we want.
God isn't
Santa Claus.

We want a dramatic healing;
sometimes what God offers
is quiet confidence and peace.
We want freedom from pain;
sometimes what God gives us
is patient endurance.
We want justice;
sometimes God's answer is that we are the ones
who will bring it.

It's not always
the answer we want.
But it's the answer
that Jesus gives us.

We live in in between times.

And God is at work, quietly
gently, answering our prayers.

So keep praying,
keep trusting,
keep living
your faith.

Because God does hear you.

God is with you.

And God loves you.