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New Testament Sermon
Text: Luke 18:1-8
October 21, 2025

Hear these words of scripture from Luke 18:

The unjust judge says this, "because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'"

6 And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. **7** And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? [1]

Introduction:

Our passage today weaves together several important themes- faith, justice, prayer, and persistence. The main thrust surrounds the term "justice." The concept is one we hear about often- cries for justice from families who have lost dear loved ones to unspeakable tragedies, justice for those experiencing raids by ICE, justice for groups of people such as the Palestinians and Ukrainians. Yet we still wonder—what does justice look like? What does it mean to receive it?

This passage in Luke gives us a glimpse through the story of a persistent widow—one who refuses to give up until justice is done. She reminds me of a woman I knew in Pittsburgh. In 2018, after her son's tragic death at a local university, Danielle Brown began a hunger strike that lasted 237 days to demand accountability and reform. Her persistence eventually led to change, the creation of a nonprofit, and a new mission to seek justice for others, but not after a long period of time. The justice she sought took time, and like the widow, she refused to remain silent.

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[1] *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

If we think about it, we've all probably met people like Ms. Brown or the widow from today's reading. I imagine this widow in our passage was worn, felt left behind, forgotten. The text seems to indicate that, though he did not originally rule in her favor, this unjust judge ultimately changed his mind and gave her what she asked. Unless she changed her ask, it seems she always deserved a ruling in her favor. So what changed? It appears her persistence.

Put yourself in her shoes for a moment- day and night, for an extended period of time, we don't know how long- it could have been similar to Danielle Brown's 237 days, the widow is asking, for justice. In *Feasting on the Word,* John Buchanan describes her this way: "Every day she asks for justice, shouts for justice. Every day, the judge ignores her. Maybe she follows him home and repeats her request nightly and the first thing in the morning. She nags and badgers; she is relentless." [2]

EXEGSIS:

Since the widow is in persistent pursuit, day and night, of something called "justice" lets unpack this word. The Greek word used here is (eck-deeh-kay-o) ἐκδικέω which means "to vindicate one's right."[3] According to Joel Green, this justice differs from the Hebrew Scriptures' call for compassion toward the widow, orphan, and stranger. Here, the focus is vindication—having

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[2] David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 4: Season after Pentecost 2 (Propers 17-Reign of Christ)* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013).
[3] Blue Letter Bible. n.d. "Strong's Greek Lexicon: G1556 – ekdikeō." Accessed September 30, 2025. https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1556/nasb20/mgnt/0-1/.

one's name cleared or wrongs made right. The widow seeks not mere sympathy, but restoration and recognition before the law.[4]

During this time, and even now, what is considered "just" according to the law does not always lead to that vindication. This exchange likely took place in a civil court, where such vindication was often slow or inaccessible to the poor. [2]

To further understand this parable, it is important to know where this passage is situated. Today's parable is found within the travel narrative of Luke. With this passage, we learn that we are still on the road, traveling with Jesus who is teaching his disciples as he goes toward Jerusalem. [4]

The audience is likely his disciples, perhaps with the Pharisees nearby.[4] The purpose, according to 18:1, is "to show them that they should always pray and not lose heart."[1] The widow's persistence becomes a living parable of steadfast prayer and faith in God's justice.
This is a teaching moment where Jesus uses an everyday experience to explain God's kin-dom. This situation would likely be a common everyday experience for women during this time and even today. People of low social status were unfortunately often ignored then and they still are now.

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[4] *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha.* Edited by Walter J. Harrelson. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003.

At its center, this story teaches that the disciples are to pray continually, trusting in God's faithfulness even amid delay or silence. The widow's persistence mirrors the perseverance required of believers who await God's justice in a world that often seems unjust.

Conclusion:

Friends, the challenge of this passage lies not in understanding it, but in living it and many of us may not like what it is calling us to do. "Do not lose heart" sounds comforting on a pillow or wall hanging—but it is difficult in practice. It is hard to be persistent in pursuit of justice when we see so many injustices around us. We see videos about ICE raids, we read about unjust leaders who believe they are above the law, we hear about people being crushed by oppressive systems. It is easy to become overwhelmed, throw up our hands, and walk away, and yet as disciples, we are not called to despair. We are called to pray without ceasing and to stand with the marginalized, oppressed, and forgotten.

As we see in today's passage, prayer and action are inseparable. Some claim that "prayer does nothing," but prayer is the foundation. When we pray for justice, we are also signing up to be a part of God's redemptive work and make ourselves available for divine use. It is both *petition* and *participation*.

We are called to be a part of the workings of God's will today, here and now: to stand with those long forgotten. We don't get to engage in "set it and forget it" prayers. They are commitments to

discern and act faithfully, to take that next faithful step. Fred Craddock reminds us that "All we know in the life of prayer is asking, seeking, knocking, and waiting, trust sometimes fainting, sometimes growing angry."[5] Even when weary, we turn again and again to the God who hears and responds.

This is a noble and hard calling, but most importantly, it is a holy calling—to stand with the oppressed, to act on behalf of the voiceless, and to trust that God's reign of justice is breaking into our world.

Remember friends, we serve a justice seeking God-the God who led Israel out of Egypt still leads us today—empowering, strengthening, and sustaining us. We are called to be justice-seeking people: praying, acting, and trusting in the One who is always faithful. We are called to do something. Are you ready? Are you willing? Let us get praying and get going! Amen.

[5] Craddock, Fred B. Luke. Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 1990.