

The Rev. Sarah Carver

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The widow in our gospel today is unremarkable. She is like so many other vulnerable people in this broken world: nameless, dismissed, exploited, invisible, with no recourse to justice because they have no power—that is held by an elite few. For the widow her situation is hopeless. Whatever has been done to her will not be made right because it doesn't have to be. Those who hold power have no incentive to help her, and it may, in fact, benefit them to keep her struggles intact. And so, the judge is indifferent to her and her situation as he is to God. And yet, in spite of it all, this widow persists in her demand to be avenged, that the wrong committed be made right and there be consequences for that wrong. Again and again, she makes her demands known to this judge, chipping away at his resolve. In the end, it is her persistence that wins the day. Wearing down the corrupted judge the widow wins her case with her relentless demands when the injustice of it all would otherwise have its way. In contrast, Jesus presents God as the just judge who will grant justice, and do so quickly when the Son of Man comes. Yet, he asks, will faith be found when he comes?

To really understand this text, one must refer to the passages found just before where Jesus talks about the final coming of the Son of Man. How it will come quickly and how God's judgement will take place as it did when God sent the flood to cover the earth, or when fire and sulfur rained down on Sodom. Remember how in both circumstances God had found the earth and the city of Sodom so filled with injustice that God decided there was nothing to do but destroy them. Like lightning will the Son of Man be, Jesus says, and it will happen in an instant; one will be taken and another left. There will be no time to prepare when it happens. Instead, now is the time to prepare, now is the time to pay attention.

Jesus is assuring his listeners that God's justice will one day be complete. And still, it's been a long time, hasn't it? Most of us would agree that the Justice of God seems to be taking its time. This might seem particularly true now in our current context where we are seeing our neighbors drug out of their homes, people using violence against one another instead of simply disagreeing, hateful speech being flung around casually when in the past it would have seemed untoward. It feels like things have gotten worse for us. And that is because things have, and the age-old question arises: Where is God in all of this? But it is important to keep in mind, that the things we are living through right now, are not new. Certainly not to the world, or even to us Americans. The world is unjust. Evil has always been present. So, what are we to do about it? What is God doing about it?

New Testament scholar and bishop, N.T. Wright argues that people are not usually adept in confronting evil. For one thing he argues that we are often surprised by it, as if it doesn't exist, and so when we respond to it, we lack nuance, falling into black and white camps of good vs

evil, good people vs bad people, taking sides in a way that fails to acknowledge that “The line between good and evil is never simply between “us” and “them. The line between good and evil runs through all of us.”¹ Because it is true that we are all touched by evil and perpetrators of it. And so, we are all, in part, responsible. It is something we are all to contend with both in the world and within ourselves. I wonder if the faith Jesus is seeking here is our acknowledgement that the world is still enslaved to sin coupled with a constant and unrelenting insistence on confronting that evil and sin while seeking to shape and live in the just world that God desires and imagines for us. That we seek to be just ourselves and for others to know justice—those who need someone to speak for them, to assist them, to protect them, while calling out the actions of those who would destroy, diminish and consume. Furthermore, is ours a faith that calls us to do this not from our presumption that we are on the right side, or that God is on our side, but that we are on God’s side, having faith that God’s justice is coming, and that God is indeed at work in the world, bringing all to redemption and that justice will be found following God’s will, following Christ’s example thus keeping us holding on to the light that is leading us all out of the darkness.

It is tempting, easy even to despair in the face of evil and assume that all is lost and there is nothing we can do allowing ourselves to turn away, to cover our eyes both from our brothers and sisters, and from God assuming that God has forsaken us; that when all is dark God is nowhere to be found and has abandoned us. And so, we can find ourselves in a kind of paralysis spiritually and otherwise. Yes, it is true that the world is still broken, yes, we struggle with one another, with ourselves; yes, we are waiting for God to fulfill all of creation and bring it to healing. And yes, we wonder why. Why is it taking so long? And this is ok. Faith is not without struggle. Look to the story of Jacob struggling with the man beside the stream. All night they wrestled until the man subdues Jacob by taking him out at the hip. And as the light breaks into the darkness, Jacob holds on to the man, refusing to let him go until the man blesses him. But Jacob receives more. Jacob is given a new name: Israel because he struggled with God and with humans and prevailed through it all. The name Israel means one who struggles with God, or God prevails. And in the struggle, in that long night, Jacob is changed, transformed into someone new as he walks into the new day.

In our formation hour, we have been learning about life in the Holy Land, particularly among Christians in the Holy Land and that means learning about the lives of Palestinians. Last week we were introduced to the health ministries the Diocese of Jerusalem provides and supports. Al Ahli Arab hospital, in Gaza, has been serving all people who come to it since 1882. It is the only Christian hospital in Gaza, affiliated to no faction, just there to meet the medical needs of anyone who has need, usually impoverished Muslim families. Over the last decade, it has been doing its work with limited resources, working with people who have no way to pay, who have illnesses and injuries consistent with living in an occupied land with inadequate food, housing, water. That was before the war. Since then, the hospital has been bombed many times,

¹ Wright, N.T. *Evil and the Justice of God*. InterVarsity Press, 2006. Here Wright is quoting Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

and the health system in Gaza has all but collapsed. And yet, this past week the diocese released a video with an update on the hospital. It is still there, still caring for people, treating war injuries, expanding its capacity to care for as many people as possible, defying by its very existence the nihilism and destruction that surrounds it. It is still there, and the same Dr. Ayyad who shared his experience of working in this hospital prior to the war, was there again with the update.

God does indeed prevail. Today we are celebrating a baptism, a celebration of new life of transformation. Today we will hear the promises God has made to us, we will hear the story of our salvation, of God's creative and saving work in the world. In return we will renew our promises to God with this little one, promising to renounce evil and sin, to turn to Jesus and to trust him, seeking God's will, serving Christ in all persons and struggling for justice and peace among all people...In our baptism we are joined to Christ and brought into the family of God. We are reminded today that God has been with us since the beginning, God is with us now, and God will be with us in all of this into eternity.

As we are called, perhaps more than we ever have been before to confront injustice, indeed evil in the world, it is ours to decide if we are willing to struggle, to struggle with our own darkness, to struggle with God in seeking justice in spite of our fear and uncertainty, and be changed through our faith that beckons us to demand again and again as the widow did, that justice prevail doing so with the hope that justice will prevail, testifying to the light that is there even when the darkness seems so overwhelming. Because it is there, just on the edges of the horizon. It is there, within our very selves. God is at work, coming into the world like flames carried by God's people.

Take the words of poet Arthur Clough:

Say not the struggle nought availeth,
The labour and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been they remain.

If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars;
It may be, in yon smoke concealed,
Your comrades chase e'en now the fliers,
And, but for you, possess the field.

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light,

In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly,
But westward, look, the land is bright.²

² <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43959/say-not-the-struggle-nought-availeth>