

## Provoked by the Parables at Brentwood Presbyterian

### The Widow and the Judge

May 29, 2011

Psalm 66:8-20 & Luke 18:1-7  
(Hymns –296, 39, 638, 440)

This is a parable about a woman who refused to be a victim and the faith that fed that refusal.

Widows in the time of Jesus had virtually no rights. Because women normally married in their early teens, widows were numerous and not necessarily old.

They were often left with no means of support.

They could not inherit their husband's estate and often provision for their upkeep was not provided.

If the woman remained with her husband's family, she was often in an inferior, almost servile, position.

If she returned to her own family, they had to repay the money exchanged at the wedding. In many cases, widows were sold into slavery to cover debts.

In the Old Testament book of Lamentations, the people of Israel after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586BC, with their prospects of ruin and exile, are likened to a widow:

*How lonely lies Jerusalem, once so full of people!  
Once honoured by the world, she is now like a widow;  
The noblest of cities has fallen into slavery.*

*All night long she cries; tears run down her cheeks.  
Of her former friends, not one is left to comfort her.  
Her allies have betrayed her and all are now against her.  
(Lamentations 1:1-2)*

Widows in the time of Jesus had a tough time of it.

But this particular widow did not let the tough times define her.

She refused to be a discouraged victim, to let the circumstances and the actions of others constrict her possibilities for a full and flourishing life.

What enabled her to do that was her relationship with God.  
Her faith led her to pray,  
to be constantly in touch with and involved with God  
as she interpreted and dealt with the world.

No matter how heartless and hard the judge was,  
no matter how corrupt the court system seemed to be,  
she remained persistent in her faith  
that God would answer her prayer and act on her behalf.  
She was patient in her prayer  
and positive in her hope and assurance  
that God would help her.

Perhaps, just perhaps,  
she remembered often the closing words of Psalm 66:

*I praise God, because he did not reject my prayer  
or keep back his constant love from me.*

What defined reality for this widow was the constant love of God.  
Everything else in her life was seen in that light.  
Nothing could separate her from that source of courage and calm.  
In the midst of her difficulties,  
she remained firm in her conviction  
that she was a beloved and protected friend of God,  
filled with patience, persistence, and hope  
in bringing about positive change in her life.

The singer and activist, Harry Belafonte, once told an interviewer that:

*You can't make change as a victim. We have to stop being victims and be more aggressive about overcoming our victimization. ... I've always looked at the world and thought what can I do next? Where do we go from here? How can we fix it? And that's how I still look at the world, because there is still so much to be done.*

Victimization is a stealthy, subtle adversary.  
It can seep into our attitudes unnoticed  
and sap our behaviours of positive energy quickly.  
It demoralizes and debilitates.

The antidote to the disease of victimization  
is faith and prayer -  
faith in the steadfast love of God  
and prayer as a way of staying in constant touch  
with the rich sources of abundant life  
found in the grace of Jesus Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Kathleen Norris understood this kind of faith when she wrote:

*Prayer is not asking for what you think you want, but asking to be changed in ways you can't imagine.*

That is what happens when we agree  
to be transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit  
in dealing with the challenges of life.

The transformation has to do with our way of seeing our lives.  
No longer do we see ourselves as the victims of circumstances,  
or the harsh views of others,  
or even our own negative self-talk.

We see ourselves afresh  
as the friends God has created and nourished.  
We see ourselves as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ  
greatly valued and honoured for the potential we have  
to serve the Kingdom of God by being blessings  
in the city to which God has sent us.

To pray daily to be transformed into blessings  
in ways we have yet to imagine –  
that is a powerful strategy  
to avoid the disease of victimization.

That is how the faith of the widow transformed her life  
and it can do the same in ours.

Written and preached by the Rev. Dr. Brian Fraser  
Minister with Brentwood Presbyterian Church  
Burnaby, BC  
[www.brentwoodpc.ca](http://www.brentwoodpc.ca)