St Peter the Fisherman – Whitianga
Sunday October 16th 2022

Theme: (Luke 18:1-8 the unjust judge)

I runga i te ingoa o te papa, te tama, me te wairua tapu.

*In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*

*Amen*

Did any of you used to watch the TV series Columbo, with Peter Falk? It was unusual, in that we, the audience knew what the crime was, and who committed it, then watched as Columbo patiently worked through the plot to discover what we already knew.

(Columbo link)

A bit like Columbo, today’s gospel reading is one of two instances in this Gospel where Luke tells us the purpose of Jesus’ parable before relating the parable itself. (The other instance is the story of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, which Maxwell will preach on next week.)

In this parable of the persistent widow a poor, powerless person (the widow) persists in nagging a corrupt, powerful person (the judge) to do justice for her. We all generally believe (especially in a relatively incorrupt country like NZ) that holding a position of power and leadership obligates you to work justly, especially on behalf of the poor and weak. Well, it seems that Jesus was well aware of the state of the legal system in Israel in his time, where life for the poor and powerless was probably just as he describes here.

The church of Luke’s day is experiencing persecution and longing for the promised Second Coming, which they expect to vindicate them and to end their suffering. However, it seems long overdue, and disciples are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain their faith.

So here, Jesus addresses the issues of faith in difficult times, and reassures the disciples that God hears their prayers. This parable calls us to maintain hope through the darkest of days. It tells us that discipleship is not an easy road but reminds us that God will vindicate faithful disciples and respond to them.

The outcome in the parable reaffirms that there is hope even in the midst of systemic injustice, that justice may be done. As Christians we are urged to work toward that hope at all times. We cannot right every wrong in the world in our lifetimes. But we must never give up hope, and never stop working for the greater good in the midst of the imperfect systems where our work occurs.

The second point Luke makes is that only God can ultimately bring about justice in a corrupt world. That is why we must continually pray and not give up in our work. God can bring miraculous justice in a corrupt world, just as God can bring miraculous healing in a sick world. Suddenly, the Berlin wall in Germany opens, the apartheid regime in South Africa crumbles, peace breaks out in Northern Ireland. Yes, there are plenty more instances where God does not yet seem to be responding to our prayers, but like the poor widow seeking her justice, we must keep on ‘nagging’ to get ours.

In the parable of the persistent widow, God does not appear to intervene. The widow’s persistence alone leads the judge to act justly. However, Jesus indicates that God is the unseen actor, because Jesus goes on to say. “Will not God grant justice for his chosen ones who cry to him day and night?” ([**Luke 18:7**](https://biblia.com/bible/nrsv/Luke%2018.7)).

Sometimes it may feel as though no matter how hard or how long we pray, God doesn’t seem to answer us. It’s now our conditioned human nature to want exactly what we ask for, when we ask for it – especially in the age of instant gratification for most secular wishes – instant noodles, instant coffee, instant news (fake or otherwise), instant response to questions or requests of Google, instant likes on Facebook or Instagram.

(I want it now song)

One of the Biblical verses that probably should be up on our Entryway walls are the words from Isaiah, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord”. I suspect none of us chose it because we don’t like the ‘non-instant’ implication, or the equally non-palatable idea that what we **want** may not be in God’s thoughts of what we actually **need**. But, if we genuinely feel so deeply about something, like today’s widow pleading for justice, and if we are prepared to demonstrate its importance by having the fortitude to continue praying about and for it, there’s such a good chance that the best of what we pray for will be granted – and yes, in God’s way and God’s time. Which, if we are willing, we usually recognise in hindsight, to be the better way and the better time than we asked for.

So, the question for us is, will we hang in there? Will we keep praying, even when our prayers don’t immediately seem to be answered? As we have all just sung, will we place into God’s hands, over and over again, our trust to deal with the injustice, hate, and conflict in our world? And, finally, “when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

Amen.