Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 24—Year C
Jeremiah 31:27-34
Psalm 119:97-104
2 Timothy 3:14-4:5
Luke 18:1-8

Today is a day to dig in. We hear the call to the **Church to persevere** in the **Collect**. We hear the call to **be persistent in Paul's second letter to Timothy**. And we get **Jesus telling the story of that widow that was relentless as she went toe-to-toe with that unjust judge**. There's a lot on the line in these stories, and a whole lot that can keep us playing small as the people of God.

Let's start with **II Timothy**. **Paul is solemnly urging Timothy to proclaim the message, to proclaim *the word*; to be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable. Paul is solemnly urging Timothy to convince, rebuke, and encourage, with a whole lot of patience. Paul understands that the time is coming when people won't put up with sound teaching, but they'll have itching ears**—what a great image—**and they'll accumulate teachers for themselves to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to *myths*.**

There's a lot here. **Paul is asking Timothy, *and us*, to be so vulnerable;** to risk **proclaiming whether the winds are favorable** to what we have to say **or not**. Paul is asking us to enter into the conversation with others—to **believe so much in the truth** we have come to know through **Christ Jesus** that we're willing to try and **convince** others, even point out where they're **missing the mark**, and for sure be voices of **encouragement** in a world that is beaten down, and to do all of this with the **utmost of patience**.

And this whole bit at the end about **turning away from listening to the truth and wandering away to myths**—we need to unpack what we mean by **myths**. ***Myths aren't necessarily bad, and they aren't necessarily good—the word in Greek means "narrative."*** **Myths** are another way of talking about our **narratives**—and **these narratives are by nature powerful**.

A **narrative** that believes **violence is redemptive**—that somehow if you hurt me and I hurt you back that is somehow healing—this is a **potent narrative** that lives in the psyche of so much of our world that is terribly **destructive** and keeps us locked in a never-ending cycle of violence.

A **narrative** that believes in **unequivocal love for our neighbor *and* for our enemies** is a **potent narrative** that takes us in a **lifegiving** direction.

So, the problem here isn't the myths, but that **people are finding teachers to weave the narrative that suits their own desires**. The problem here is that **everyone is picking their own narrative that fits their own particular worldview**, ***instead of letting a bigger narrative shape and critique them.***

And we need to remember, even though **Paul** is talking about the **value of the sacred writings**—**Paul never talks of these without running them through the prism of Christ Jesus—his life, his teaching, his death and resurrection, his wholeness.** The **message**, ***the word***, we **proclaim**

isn't just words on a page, but **the Word made flesh—we proclaim the way of Jesus as we see it lived out in his flesh; we proclaim Christ Jesus, crucified and risen.**

Man, do we ever live in a **world of narratives** these days. So, which narrative is shaping you? Which narrative informs your deepest values, your choices, and plays out in your behaviors? And what narrative calls you up short when you need to be brought back into alignment with those deepest values? So many narratives are competing for our attention, *and for our hearts*; **itching ears** are a temptation for all of us; it takes persistence to keep our ears **tuned to the voice** who bids us to **lose our life for his sake and to come and follow him**.

And what do we see from that **relentless widow in Luke 18?** Goodness, I love her feistiness, her spunk! She's **not threatened at all by this judge**. His reputation was well known in the city—**he didn't fear God *and* he didn't respect people**. But **the widow**, **the widow just kept coming to him and coming to him and coming to him seeking justice against her opponent. For a while he refused, but she flat wore him out by her coming to him**—the Greek says she *"beat him black and blue*"—not with her fists but with the **power of her presence**. Eventually, **her persistence tips the scales, and the judge grants her justice**—*granting justice was easier for the unjust judge than getting worn out*.

We can get so caught up in the **narrative of the widow and the unjust judge** that we forget that ***Jesus is telling this story to his disciples***. At this point, he moves out of the narrative **back to his disciples** and **reminds them that if the unjust judge can grant justice to the widow, how much more will God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry out for that justice day and night.** But then Jesus poses a haunting question, **"And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"**

*Will he **find anyone who actually trusts that God cares about the injustices of this world**? Will he **find anyone that trusts that such persistence in the face of injustice really can turn the tide and tip the scales**? Will he **find anyone that trusts that our voices and our presence are powerful and make a difference when we go up against unjust powerful forces**?*

What do you think is the greatest obstacle for the disciples as they do this work of seeking justice? *(pause)* Is it their energy? Is it their fear of the powers-that-be? Is it the David vs. Golaith feeling that makes them feel small?

I think beyond all of these, it's getting to that place where **they lose heart**. We learn at the beginning of this passage that **Jesus** wraps this whole narrative around the disciples as a way to **teach them of their need to pray always and not to lose heart**. ***Losing heart is the most dangerous thing that gives the unjust forces and powers of this world room to run.***

So, when we're up against such powers, **how do we not lose heart**?

And here, we come round to **Jeremiah**. When we are tempted to lose heart, we remember that **it's not our heart that beats within us—it's a heart that's been made new; a heart that God has etched the deepest knowing ever into—"I will be their God, and they shall be my people." It is no longer the case that people know this by teaching one another—God has written this KNOWING into their heart.**

When you know that you belong to God and that God has claimed you as God's own beloved, when your heart beats with that deep knowing, then ultimately, your heart can't be lost because its already been found. That doesn't mean that we don't feel like giving up sometimes, but it does mean that we have a solid place to rest, catch our breath, and begin again.

When the Son of Man comes, will he find anyone on earth who trusts this deep knowing, who trusts how unbelievably strong their heart really is?

Dear People of God, I know it's **tempting to lose heart these days**, ***but you can't lose what God has already claimed and loved and made whole.*** **Persevere, persist, proclaim with all your heart the good news of God and God's love for all people; with the heart and feistiness of that relentless widow, proclaim God's love for justice; trust the truth of the unfathomable love that God has written on your heart and make it known to all those whose ears are itching to know this good news.** Amen.

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