

What a strange parable this is! I hope you parents appreciate the fact that I did not use my little wooden figurines to tell this one to the children and admonish them to be like the widow woman and nag, nag, nag until they get what they want! Only Jesus would have thought to compare God with a judge who doesn't give a flip about justice! And there's the nagging woman who just won't give it up. Now think about it--this was a society who put women in the category of “seen but not heard.” Well, this woman was definitely making herself heard.

What is at stake here is “justice.” So often we think that what God cares about is that we trust and obey. That's something we are trained early on in life to listen to and do. But if we read the prophets of old, and if we read carefully, Jesus' message, then we discover that in addition to trust and obedience, justice is a really big “talking point” in Jesus' ministry.

Remember Micah 6: “What does the Lord require of you?” But to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God. The theologian, Robert McAfee Brown, says this text is circular. *To do justice is to love mercy and to love mercy is to walk humbly with God, and to walk humbly with God is to do justice.* It's a never ending labyrinth of how to live life.

Today's passage is about justice and how to get it. And there's a lot to learn from it. One thing we learn is that it doesn't come easily. Justice has to be worked for. I thought about naming this sermon “persistence pays off” because in this parable justice only comes after the widow nags and nags and nags. But I decided to avoid the title “Persistence pays off” because no matter how persistent we may be, sometimes it doesn't pay off in our lifetime and that doesn't mean we've failed as long as we tried faithfully to work for justice. Ultimate justice comes in God's good time, not according to our clocks.

What makes justice possible? Rev. Marie Fortune, a UCC pastor, is one of the foremost authorities on violence and sexual abuse in the country. She runs a center in Seattle to not only heal the abused but to educate others on how to help those who are victims of violence or abuse. She outlines several key steps to achieving justice for people who find themselves victims.

One of the important first steps toward finding justice is to be heard and believed. People often carry within their hearts deep unspoken wounds. Perhaps they are silent because they do not think there is anyone to listen or if they are listened to, perhaps they fear they will not be believed.

The brilliant writer Maya Angelou was raped by a family friend at a very young age. She was told that if she told anyone about it, something awful would happen. So for seven years, she was mute. She did not say a word. But she read; she read every book she could get her hands on. She writes, that when she finally began to speak again, she had a lot to say, and the means to say it. And today people listen to her words.

This week a friend loaned me a DVD called *Rwanda Rising*. It's the story of how Rwanda has risen from the depths of the terrible genocide in 1994 to rebuild its country and create a future. It shows women setting beside each other, one woman married to a man awaiting trial for murder during the genocide and the woman beside her having had her family murdered.

The women have renewed the tradition of basket weaving, an art of their mothers and grandmothers. These baskets have become a source of income for the poorest of the poor in that country. They are called peace baskets. The women sit for hours; they work; they talk; they find things they have in common; they make peace. Perhaps they find forgiveness a little easier because everyone focuses blame on the previous government who commanded the killings.

“Kill or be killed” was the way it went. But still...could we sit with someone whose relatives had killed our loved ones?

They talk about the awfulness of the genocide which went largely unnoticed by the world, and they speak of moving on, not forgetting, certainly remembering through story and memorials, through mass graves and museums, but they say they must move on; there is nothing else they can do. Consequently, Rwanda has become one of the safest countries to visit. Its tourism is thriving. Its country is beautiful. Its the only place where you can hike into a reserve and sit a few feet away from the mountain gorillas which are being protected and now are very gradually increasing in numbers. Education is free for all children through the eleventh grade which is not the case in all African countries. From death and destruction they are making justice, making a nation, and making peace. All because they will “never give up.”

This weekend in October many congregations and synagogues and mosques celebrate Children’s Sabbath. I hope that our children feel every Sunday is especially for them. I know that we are all God’s children, and yet, the youngest are more vulnerable and dependent on us adult children to make the world safe for them. This is why I feel sad when children are given up as failures because they can’t measure up to standardized tests.

Our girls went to a wonderful elementary school called Sycamore where grades were not given, tests were rare, and collaborative learning was emphasized. The different learning styles of children were honored. Our girls learned to love to learn. I am so grateful for those in our midst who give themselves day in and day out to teach. It’s pure joy to watch Heidi in the classroom with her children. Her love for them and expertise is transparent.

Also on this Children’s Sabbath I cannot understand why Deamonte, a 12 year old boy, died because his mother could not find a dentist who took children with Medicaid or the State Children’s Health Insurance Program, or Devante, whose mother followed all the rules to get her son enrolled in Texas’ Medicaid program but it took four months, long enough for his kidney cancer to kill him at age 14, or Camilla, a 12 year old girl with cystic fibrosis, both parents working and still they can’t afford the buy-in fee for health insurance along with Camilla’s daily medication. When Camilla was asked what she wanted to grow up to be, she replied “Eighteen.” Are these children less precious than those that gather around me on Sunday morning? Are they to be punished because their parents are poor? Pondering these questions, it would be easy to lose heart, to give up.

People of God, it seems we have a lot of nagging to do. I know *you* to be people who “never give up.” You speak out; you sometimes even nag; you speak truth; you get discouraged and yet, you “never give up or lose heart.” Justice doesn’t come easy. Justice takes a consistent, persistent circular living of doing the acts that make for justice, loving mercy with all our hearts, and walking with humility in the presence of a God who cheers us on and encourages us “don’t lose heart, never give up!”