

Collect, Readings and Reflection for 19 October 2025, the 18th Sunday after Trinity

Collect *(the Church's prayer for today):*

God, our judge and saviour,
teach us to be open to your truth
and to trust in your love,
that we may live each day
with confidence in the salvation which is given
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Readings: Luke 18:1-8; 2 Tim 3:14-4:5

Today's reflection is by Reader, Cal Bailey.

I wonder what season your faith is in? Is it spring, with new growth budding or lots of learning? Or summer with a spiritual life full of the presence of God? Or autumn with much fruit but some dying too? Or winter with few signs of life?

Our faith can be seasonal. For some it seems to be winter much of the time. Mother Theresa, the most famous saint of the twentieth century who homed the homeless of Calcutta, used to speak in her letters of the 'tunnel' she was in for 50 years. She wrote: "I am told God loves me and yet the reality of darkness and coldness and emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul... did I make a mistake in surrendering so blindly to the Call of the Sacred Heart?"

I wonder if you've ever felt discouraged? Silly question, for most of us, I guess. Of course we have. In the world of recruitment, there is a saying that people join a company and leave their boss; they join because of the vision painted for them during the recruitment process; but they leave because of their boss, who has discouraged them so much they want to start again somewhere new.

It's certainly been true for me. I remember Richard, the leader of the Christian Union at uni, saying to me at down moments: "Cal, let's just keep on truckin' for Mr G" to try to encourage me. He was a kind guy who's had a difficult life since. He's been discouraged by many things and it's now my job to encourage him. Let's see if this parable can help. I want to look at it in 3 ways.

[v2] "There was a judge who neither feared God, nor cared about men". So he wasn't motivated by people in need of his help, or by God who would judge him for being lazy and selfish. In those days in Israel, being a judge wasn't paid – so he wouldn't be afraid of losing his job. So what did motivate him?

[v3] "There was a widow who kept coming to him to grant justice against her adversary." Widows were often destitute in those days – the wage earner had died. Who would care for her? The law instructed everyone to care for widows, orphans and

foreigners – but people often ignored the law. Let's try to imagine her situation. Perhaps she wanted a share of her dead husband's assets, which – under law – all went to his brother, so she had enough to live on? Perhaps she had children whom she had no money to feed? Or maybe she's seeking fairness for a friend of hers who's in even greater need but doesn't know any lawyers. She at least knows this judge.

She approaches the judge, expecting him to do his job. And he ignores her. Repeatedly. She's certain she's in the right, but she needs this judge to bring her adversary to court and listen to them both, pass judgement and then see that it's enforced. But the judge couldn't care less.

She's angry that the man who's been appointed to this important position won't do his job; angry perhaps that he does justice for *some* people but not for others; for men, perhaps, but not women. For rich people who can pay well, but not for poor people who can't. For powerful people, whom he looks up to or wants favours from, but not insignificant widows. She can't even bribe him, because she has no money.

So she nags him. Daily. Maybe hourly! On the judge's way to court, and on the way home again. During the day, and during the night. In good weather and in bad. Quietly, to begin with, then loudly. Privately, then also publicly. In front of his wife, his kids, his neighbours. Jesus says he begins to fear she's going to attack him!

On her side is justice, persistence, and utter shamelessness. She simply needs the judge to do his job! She has every reason to be discouraged – but in her need she carries on. She is the definition of dogged persistence.

And eventually the judge comes to his senses and says to himself (v4) “Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!”

Eventually, she wins. This is a story of human perseverance. It's a parable to show that eventually dogged perseverance defeats selfishness and laziness. That's the first way of looking at this parable, and it's the way Mother Theresa lived and worked.

Secondly, it's a story about God. We often conceive of God as a judge. We often pray about things we would like God to take in hand for us – things to do with our family, with our work, our locality or nation. And sometimes it seems we can pray the same prayer repeatedly. God seems to do nothing. God seems to be like the lazy judge.

But if even lazy judges answer widow's petitions, then so will God answer our prayers. That's one way of seeing God in this parable.

But I want us to use our imagination and conceive of a different story about God here. Is it possible that God is like the persistent widow? I want to suggest to you that if God the Father is like the judge, then God the Son, Jesus, is like the doggedly persistent widow. He's journeying to Jerusalem at this point in Luke's gospel. His followers can't understand why they're heading towards the place where all the trouble happens. But

Jesus is insistent. We read (9:51), “As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus *resolutely* set out for Jerusalem.”

Even the Pharisees tried to dissuade him (13:31) “Pharisees came to him and said ‘Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.’”

Is it possible Jesus is likening himself to a widow, whose determination for justice is like Jesus’ determination to show the world what goodness looks like and how a much better way of life starts and grows? Even if it means humiliation and shame and beating and crucifixion.

That’s the second way of thinking about this parable. The third is – perhaps – more far-fetched. The idea comes from a friend of mine, who is a vicar and runs annual conferences on disability. He asked the delegates whether they thought either the judge or the widow displayed signs of neuro-divergence; and if so, who demonstrated them most.

The conversation was extremely interesting. People definitely felt both characters were neuro-divergent. He reflected that today, we’re very conscious of many types of neuro-divergence, and many people are discovering themselves to have these characteristics. In those days, it was misunderstood, and it doubtless still is. But what was especially interesting to people at the conference is that Jesus in this parable was portraying God as so focused on his mission, so single-minded, as to be neuro-divergent. I wonder what this might say to people who think *they* are neuro-divergent?

The challenge for all of us when we’re discouraged is How can we muster the faith to keep going? How can we remain as focused as the woman was? As Mother Theresa was? Can we continue to pray for people to come to faith? Can we share with others the blessings Jesus came to share with us? Can we continue doggedly to seek justice on earth and to grow his kingdom here?

For me, the message of this parable is two-fold.

Firstly that God the Father is far more interested in bringing justice than a lazy, selfish judge. But even a lazy judge will bring justice in the end! So we must be faithful and patient.

And secondly, that God the Son’s determination to bring God’s kingdom is like this nagging, persistent, shameless widow.

When we’re feeling discouraged, if we can trust God either as Father or as Jesus, then we’ve got what we need to keep on truckin’ with Mr G.

Amen.