

Sermon 17 October 2010

Luke 18: 1-8

Hang in there — pray always and do not lose heart

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‘Wild celebrations broke out in Chile as a complex against-all-odds rescue of 33 miners is successfully completed, ending the longest underground entrapment in history.’ reports the Canberra Times (Friday 15 October).

Ten long weeks of waiting (they weren’t discovered for the first two weeks) of careful planning and execution of an almost miraculous rescue. Were they tempted to give up hope?

Ten weeks is a very long time to be trapped in a dark cave deep underground. People all over the world were praying; locals keeping vigil; countries worked together pooling expertise.

Now the miners are all out, safe and facing the physical and psychological consequences. Someone, many, believed and worked very hard for this to happen.

The writer of Luke introduces Jesus’ parable urging us to ‘pray always and not to lost heart’. The parable encourages and gives hope to those who society sometimes neglects. It also speaks of gutsiness and persistence in the pursuit of justice.

The Judge, an almost cartoon character was not doing his job. He didn’t care; he should have been this woman’s advocate, yet he turns his back.

She is desperate. Apparently she has no male relatives to please her case, ‘so she dares to enter the forbidden public realm of men to do the impossible — challenge a man of great power. But she does have the power of courage and persistence on her side, and is continually coming to plead her case for justice. The alternative to getting justice in her case is most likely homelessness and even possible starvation. For without a male sponsor, she has few respectable means to support herself.’ (Charles McCollough *The Art of the Parables*, Copperhouse Books 2008 in Seasons of the Spirit. Congregational Life Pentecost 2, p71, 2010)

She hangs in there because she is desperate — and eventually, after who knows how long — maybe also ten weeks or more, she wins. Her persistence and the legality of her claim is begrudgingly rewarded by the amoral judge.

Justice triumphs!

‘Don’t lose heart’, Luke, the gospel writer says. ‘Don’t lose heart’, pray constantly, hang in there. Ask boldly, live justly, work against injustice. Keep going; keep praying! It’s worth it!

Of course the widow hung in there — she had no option. What about us, when seeking justice for others? It ain’t easy. ‘The author of Luke leaves Jesus’ question hanging for us to answer: will faith be found when the reign of God comes in it fullness?

Some suggest, 'Those who are persistent in prayer do not lose heart while waiting and working for God's way (*Seasons of the Spirit*. Congregational Life Pentecost 2, 2010, p66).

Mary MacKillop is to be made an official saint today. She was a woman who cared for the poor, who taught children of all backgrounds — out in the open if necessary — from South Australia to Queensland.

Mary was excommunicated from the Catholic Church. I gather the reason was that she was a whistle blower. She exposed a priest who was abusing children — a paedophile (though this reason is swept under the carpet). Rather ironic don't you think given the current state of affairs? She, like the widow, was courageous and persistent in seeking justice. In Mary's case, justice for others, and she paid a heavy price.

Finally Mary receives recognition as a holy woman, a saint today — a person of courage, guts and conviction.

We too are invited to voice our deep longings to God; to ask boldly and live justly while seeking justice and equity for all people.

Prayer plays an important role in this.

In the poem "The Wind, One Brilliant Day" by Antonio Machado, the wind calls and asks for the fragrances of the gardener's flowers to be set upon it so the breezes can carry the beauty forth and share it with the world. But the gardener confesses to the wind, "I have no roses; all the flowers in my garden are dead." The wind must satisfy itself with withered petals, dried leaves, and waters from the fountain. The final stanza of the poem reads:

The wind left. And I wept. And I said to myself:
"What have you done
with the garden that was entrusted to you?"

This is the sentiment offered by the gospel writer in the final verse of the parable in Luke 18: 1-8, "...when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" What fragrances does your faith spread into the world? Where would one see justice, kindness, and compassion growing in your community?

"Justice work, by its very nature, required time and patience. It requires persistence." (from the article "Persistent Justice," p.72) 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5 affirms this reality. "How are you persistent in seeking justice, even in the midst of resistance? What obstacles sometimes cause you to give up?" (*Seasons of the Spirit*. Congregational Life Pentecost 2 2010)

From Fraser Macnaughton (Spirit Sightings)

If there is one international news story that epitomises perseverance it is the continuing desire to seek a meaningful, lasting solution to the situation in Israel/Palestine. One story in this longest of long running sagas is a recent one involving Jewish activists planning to break the Israeli blockage of Gaza. A boat carrying Jewish activists from Israel, Germany, the US and Britain set sail for Gaza, hoping to breach Israel's naval blockade there. This comes four months after Israeli commandos

boarded a flotilla of Gaza-bound ships, killing eight pro-Palestinian Turkish activists and a Turkish American aboard the 'Mavi Marmara'.

Richard Kuper, an organiser with the British group "Jews for Justice for Palestinians," said one goal was to show that not all Jews supported Israeli policies towards Palestinians. Kuper said the boat, which set sail from northern Cyprus flying a British flag, would not resist Israeli authorities. Rami Elhanan, an Israeli passenger whose daughter Smadar was killed in a suicide bombing at a shopping mall in Jerusalem in 1997, said it was his "moral duty" to act in support of Palestinians in Gaza because reconciliation was the surest path to peace. Alison Prager, another organiser from "Jews for Justice for Palestinians," said many Jews had been on previous "blockade-busting trips" to Gaza, but this was the first time Jewish groups had banded together to send a boat of their own.

The voyage came as Israelis, Palestinians, and US mediators sought a compromise that would allow talks to continue after an agreement to slow Israeli settlement building expired. Kuper said the activists were not seeking to support Hamas, but to send a message that Gaza civilians should not be punished for the actions of their rulers. The vessel plans to deliver children's toys, medical equipment, outboard motors for fishing boats, and books to Gaza residents. He said the voyage was a "symbolic statement" intended to draw attention to what he called Israel's "illegal, unnecessary and inhumane" blockage of Gaza. "Jewish communities around the world are not united in support of Israel," Kuper said in a telephone interview from London. "Israel's future peace is coming to terms quickly with the Palestinians." The trip was funded entirely by supporters' donations, he added.

As you recall Jesus' guidance to the disciples about 'praying always', in what ways might this be implemented in your life?

May we move closer to the reign of God by realising prayer is a way of life as much as a recitation of words or a shopping list of wants.

Amen. (Spirit Sightings)