

## Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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I led my first protest when I was 10. Grandpa had some stressful paperwork he was doing, and we were, *allegedly*, pestering him about getting ice cream, and he lost his temper, something he *never* did, and yelled. I felt this was unacceptable behavior and we should have ice cream. I discussed this with my little sister, and we felt there were a variety of other issues too. They keep saying we'll go to the amusement park this summer, but when? Why can't bedtime be later? What if there was a trampoline? We had Grievances. So as the eldest, I felt we only had one course of action. We announced we were going on strike and headed out to the front yard. Did we have picket signs? Yes. Were they misspelled? Also yes. Did some of the neighbors get into their cars and drive past Gram and Grandpa's house for the express purpose of honking to show their support because they thought this was the funniest thing ever? Oh absolutely. There were several attempts to get the three of us to cut it out and come inside but we would not be stopped and would not come in until our conditions were met. Baby sister's nap time is of no interest to us, we are striking. Eventually Gram came out and announced that Grandpa had had enough, we won. We were no fools; I wrote our demands on a purple piece of construction paper, declared it a Peace Treaty and said we wouldn't go in unless he signed it with Gram as a witness. This peace treaty was a treasured document to my grandmother, she framed it and hung it in the kitchen like it was a piece of art.

And about a month after these events, this gospel passage was read in church and I sat in the pew and nodded along sagely because I had actually tried this, basically, and in my experience, yes continually aggravating authority figures until they get exasperated and give in does work in real life. I guess it works like this with God too and I should do this with my prayers and just kind of wear God down with my demands until my prayers are granted! Thanks for the intel, Jesus. Now this might shock everyone to hear this, but it turns out there's more nuance to this passage than 10-year-old me picked up on. You might already notice the flaw in that line of reasoning, that God is *not* an unjust judge, but rather someone who delights in justice. So what gives Jesus? Let's back up and recalibrate.

In the verses immediately before this, Jesus tells his disciples what will happen when the days of the Son of Humanity come. That it will be like a flash of lightning across the sky. That those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it. That two people will be in the field and one will be taken and the other left. And they ask him where this will take place, and Jesus says, "where there is a dead body, there the vultures gather." So kind of some heavy imagery going on here. And *then* we get to today's reading where Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not lose heart. This is a parable to reassure and to comfort. And part of the way Jesus does this is by meeting the disciples where they are.

The idea that God could be a loving parent wasn't really familiar imagery during that time. God as King or Judge or even Avenging Warrior, sure but Father? not so much. But the thing is, these images—as well as Father--carried with them their own baggage. People had first hand experience with kings and judges and even

warriors and those people...were people and flawed. So for people, like the disciples, who were on the receiving end of that flawed behavior...that's just part of how the role works. And that's not a criticism of the disciples, that's just how our lived experiences shape us. If you've had a teacher who never answered your questions, you might carry with you the assumption that teachers never listen and so you stop trying to ask. If your spouse doesn't support your hobbies, you might assume your friend's spouse is also unsupportive, and that influences the sort of advice you give them. If you were misdiagnosed by a doctor in the past, you might carry with you the idea that medical personnel don't know what they're doing and be wary about seeking medical attention in the future. And for many people both in the disciples' time and in ours, who have experienced some aspect of corruption by the court system, they carry with them that judges act unjustly. And so then when those same people picture this Judge named God...well they already know how judges work, right? The vulnerable need to basically force them to do their jobs!

And what I love about this story is that Jesus doesn't try to fight against those lived experiences. He's not negating them; he's not trying to convince his disciples they're wrong. Because that's not the issue at hand right now. They are feeling a little anxious about this whole coming of the Son of Humanity thing and God is a judge so...what will that future be like for them? And he meets them right where they are in that anxiety. "My friends, keep praying do not lose heart. Here is a story about a judge, one that is almost a caricature of all the notions you have about what judges are like" --call me a skeptic, but I don't think anyone actually says, even to themselves "though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone."

Anyhow—“even this, the worst judge ever, if he were continually harassed by petitions, *would still give in* to the demands if only to spare himself.

And if that is what the worst judge ever would do...won't our God, who is entirely just listen to the appeals brought before Her? The translation here speaks of those who “cry out” to God, and this Greek word is only used a handful of other times in the gospels. Bartimaeus **cried out** “Jesus Son of David have Mercy on me” and asked Jesus to give him sight. A man **cried out** to Jesus because his son kept having seizures and he had no way of stopping them. John the Baptist was the voice of one **crying out** in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord. Jesus hung on the cross and **cried out** my God my God why have you forsaken me? Jesus isn't talking about volume, but emotion. He's talking about those prayers where you're wailing and shrieking and trembling. Where your voice is barely a whisper. Where you are so distraught that you can't even form the words. Where your sorrow or terror or rage is all encompassing. Where you can't even form a plan for what to do next. Where you're overwhelmed by the injustice of this age and running low on hope. Where you're at the end of your rope and don't know how you will continue to endure this. And so you cry out to God.

Will God ignore us? Dismiss us? Say “meh I'll deal with that later?” or “serves them right?” Jesus says no! That God hears those desperate prayers and will respond with justice. Not because we're bothering God and God wants us to shut up and come inside already, but because God cares for us. Jesus assures us that justice will come in the same way that the coming of the Son of Humanity does—like a flash of lightning across the sky. And maybe that happens quickly, but maybe it just happens suddenly. You cry out to God day and night and nothing changes and

things continue to look hopeless and you're ready to give up and then --abruptly and with no warning—your prayers are answered.

And so beloved, do not lose heart. Pray always, but especially when things are at their worst, and you need to cry out. God is there for you, meeting you where you are, even and especially in those raw states, because there is no feeling you can have that is “too much” for God. God can handle all your feelings, even the sorrow, or the rage, or the terror, or the confusion, or the doubt. And there is no exception to this. With God you don't have to pretend you're fine when you're not. Times are tough, but we have the only perfect judge by our side, and she cares for you so much. So take heart, justice is coming.