

Luke 18:1-8 The Unjust Judge

The story we've just heard from the Gospel of Luke is often called "the parable of the unjust judge". It's not talking about justice in the way we usually think about it - which is crime being punished. Rather it is about justice in the sense of fairness and equity. Jesus' story highlights a judge who has the power to make a difference in a widow's life by intervening to stop her being exploited, but who doesn't care and would rather not get involved.

This issue of injustice is one of the big questions of life, isn't it? If we stop to listen to people's questions about God, one we always hear is, "If God is a good God, why is there so much injustice in the world?" We are disturbed when innocent children starve, when the vulnerable are preyed upon, and when their defences are violated. Where is God in all this?

It is of course a big question. And there are no easy answers. As I've pondered on this question over the years, I've realised a few things.

1. One is, God doesn't cause the injustice and suffering in the world – we do. It's one of the consequences of the choices a greedy world makes. The strong exploit the weak for what they can gain. The pursuit of power is centred in greed. Power is all about manipulating others for personal gain. Greed is at the root of all injustice. And God has given us the freedom to be greedy, if that's what we choose.

There is enough food and water on this planet to meet the needs of every living being. But tragically, 80% of the world's resources are consumed by only 20% of the people. Such injustice – and here in Australia we are part of the 20% that is doing all the consuming!

2. Another thing I've realised is that God's promise to supply all our needs is deeply connected to people's willingness to live sacrificially. God's blessings much of the time, are the other side of the coin to sacrifice. Ronald Sider, a champion of social justice who lived and wrote in the 1960s said, "We need to live simply, so that others may simply live."

Sider advocated for the three Rs in a big way - Reduce, Re-use and Re-Cycle.

- To reduce means to de-clutter - like getting rid of all those clothes we have which we haven't worn for years; or all that stuff in our cupboards or the the garage we have that we use once every five years, or not at all...
- To re-use means extending the use of the things we already have. Mending them when they break where we can, and not giving in to social pressure to buy the latest and greatest.
- To re-cycle doesn't just mean putting our specified rubbish in our yellow bin. It means finding new uses for things we've finished with, or passing them on to others to use.

If we do these things, then we will naturally consume less, and we begin to make a difference.

One of the most encouraging trends I've seen in recent years is what has been called the 'Tiny House' movement. This is where people who have lived in large homes all their lives, which consume time, energy and resources, have made the decision to sell up, and live in a house with a much smaller footprint. Many of the 'tiny houses' being built now are around 40 square metres, and they make use of loft space, so that the actual footprint is less than 30 square metres. That's about the size of two rooms. Most westerners live in homes that would be big enough to house several families in poorer countries. I'd have to say this is on our mind...our house is pretty big. (though we do have two families living in it)

3. A third thing I've realised, as I've continued on my Christian journey, is that persistence and prayer really do make a difference.

In these verses from Luke chapter 18, Jesus is saying to us "don't give up! Hang in there." The parable of the unjust or unrighteous judge and the widow teaches just one point. The point is not to describe the woman or the nature of God. The single point of this parable is that if an unjust or unrighteous, secular judge will finally hear your appeals, how much more will your appeals be heard by your heavenly Father, who loves you and cares about you supremely.

If we say, with persistence, "Father, please help," He will hear.

When we lived in Jindabyne, Toby and Micah were still at school. Toby finished years 11 & 12 while we were there - two very stressful years. There were times when the stress would get to Toby, and he'd have a melt down. He'd sit there and look at an essay topic get panicky and not know where to start. When he got really stuck, he'd get up, come into my study and say pleadingly, "Mum, please help?" How could I not? How can any loving parent refuse help to their child? So we'd sit down together, and after a while he'd get going again.

How can God not help when we ask him? We need to believe that God is on our side—always – and allow that to strengthen our faith.

Often when we're confronted with the scope of the injustice in our world, we can be overwhelmed by the enormity of the problem. We find ourselves saying, "I'm just one person – what can I do? What difference can I possibly make?"

We can make a difference.

We can make a difference, as I've said, by making personal choices about our own lifestyle. We can take a long hard look at the way we live, and find ways to live more simply.

We can make a difference by getting involved in helping the poor and the marginalised in our own community. Ask, who are they? What do they need? How can we, and our community of faith, help set right the inequity and injustice on our own doorstep.

At present, Parish council is looking at making the church cottage available through Anglicare for crisis accommodation in our region. There is a critical need there, and it is a need that we have the resources to help with.

We can also write letters to our members of parliament, and lobby on behalf of those who have a no voice.

It has been heartening to see, in our latest council election, the enthusiastic group of locals that has arisen, committed to giving their community a voice.

It's also heartening to see the number of folk in our community of faith who give of their time to Vinnies and Monties and the nursing homes, and who volunteer in the community in different ways.

And most importantly, we can pray. Prayer is never a last resort - you know, "Oh well. There's nothing else we can do, so let's at least pray about it..." We should never underestimate the power of our prayers. Jesus said that if we had faith as big as a mustard seed we could move a

mountain. A mustard seed is pretty small (Joan gave me this mustard seed brooch a couple of years ago) Jesus was saying you only need the tiniest bit of faith, and it will move the hand of God.

The problem of injustice is not beyond our power to address.

Let me close with a little story...

After a few days of stormy weather, the huge surf threw thousands of starfish up on the beach. Finally the clouds receded, the sun came out and the starfish began to bake on the hot sand.

As a man walked his dog along the beach, he came upon a little boy who was picking up the starfish one at a time and throwing them back into the sea.

The man stopped, watched the boy for a minute, and then said sympathetically, "Son, look at all these starfish. There must be thousands of them. Don't waste your time. It's not going to make any difference." The little boy looked at the starfish in his hand, solemnly met the man's eyes, and said simply, "It will make a difference to this one." And he threw it in the sea.

Let's pray.