

The Big Question

Luke 18: 1-8

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First Federated Church

Peoria, Illinois

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(*SERMON NOTES*)

Text: *When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth? (vs. 8b)*

A Chicagoan left the snow-filled streets of Chicago for a vacation in Florida. His wife was on a business trip and was planning to join him there the next day. When he reached his hotel, he decided to send her a quick e-mail. Unfortunately, when typing her address, he missed one letter, and his note went to an elderly woman whose husband had completed this part of Life only the day before. When the grieving widow checked her e-mail, she took one look at the monitor, let out a piercing scream, and fell to the floor in a dead faint."

At the sound of her scream, her family rushed into the room and saw the woman passed out on the floor near the computer. As she came to they asked her what so upset her. She feebly pointed toward the computer screen. On the screen they read the misdirected email:

"Dearest Wife," it said.

"Just got checked in. Everything prepared for your arrival tomorrow.

Your loving husband.

P.S. Be sure to pack something cool. It sure is hot down here."

Context is a key component in understanding a lot of things.

I do not know how many times I have delivered a sermon on our gospel, let alone read it. But each time I approach it, I see something new that never struck me before.

In my youth I believed that our gospel lesson was about "persistence in prayer;" that if I was just persistent in what I prayed for, if I asked passionately enough, hard enough, persistently enough, eventually I would be able to "wear God down," and the Almighty would acquiesce to my desire. In other words, I could bend God to my will, my way of thinking! *And*, if that didn't happen, then it was somehow my fault! That was really a pretty childish understand of God, prayer and this text.

But you can understand, can't you, how I could come to such a conclusion? After all, a cursory reading of the lesson would seem to associate God with the heartless Judge and us with the widow.

Jesus was fond of teaching by use of what is sometimes called metaphors of contrast. For example, in Matthew's gospel he contrasts a parent's love for their child and God's love for us (Tell the story)

Earlier in Luke's gospel he tells the story that comes to the friend at midnight (Tell the story)

So, in our parable, God is not like the judge at all, *but* if a heartless, compassionless judge can be moved by a widow's persistent pleading, then how much more ready is God, who by definition is the very epitome of Love, give to his children what they need?

But then we come to the last sentence in the reading—the one that reached out and grabbed me, smacking me sharply across the face. It is *The Question*.

When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?

I knew that the key to discovering why that question was tied to the parable had to be the context in which the parable was delivered. And when I looked at that, I discovered a gospel gem that I had never before seen.

Remember, now, Luke is a carefully constructed gospel.

Immediately preceding our lesson, the context in which Jesus delivered this parable, Jesus warns his disciples that hard times are coming. Very hard times will come upon the Church. He used metaphors that his listeners and the first readers of the gospel would immediately understand.

It will be like it was in the days of Noah,
the days of Lot.

It will seem as if the very moral fabric of the culture is unraveling.

It will seem as though everything is spinning out of control.

It will seem as if everything is falling apart.

It will seem like everything that we've always believed in,
is under attack.

It will seem as if our very world is being turned upside down.

It will seem as if there is no Hope for the Future.

It is within *that* context that Jesus told today's parable and asked one of the gospel's most important questions:

When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith?

Now, if you don't know you need to know that the title "The Son of Man" is apocalyptic code for God at the End of Time.

So the question that Jesus really asked is this:

Is our Faith in the goodness of God strong enough to trust in God's care when we are hopelessly adrift?"

Do we trust in the ultimate goodness of God even when things are going horribly wrong?

Is our faith such that we can believe in God even when there is no evidence of the Almighty's Presence?

In such a time, someone once scrawled on a concentration camp wall:

*I believe in the sun even when it is not shining,
and I believe in love, even when there's no one there.*

I believe in God even when he is silent,

I believe through any trial,

there is always a way.

But sometimes in this suffering and hopeless despair,

My heart cries for shelter,

to know someone's there.

But a voice rises within me, saying "hold on, my child.

I'll give you strength, I'll give you hope,

just stay a little while."

In our closing hymn this morning we will sing,

Our God has made this world;

Oh, let us ne'er forget

That though the wrong seems oft so strong,

God is the ruler yet.

So the great question is still before us.

When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith?

Whether you believe in a literal return of the Son of Man like the "Left Behind" series of novels, or whether you believe that the Son of Man comes to meet us as we leave this Life behind and enter into the next, or whether you believe something somewhere in between, I don't think really makes a difference because the question is still there.

When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith?

Will He find us faithfully doing what we've been called to do;

feeding the hungry,

clothing the naked,

caring for the neglected,

healing the sick,

living the Love of God

in our homes,

communities,

nation

and around the world?

Will he?

Well, I don't know; that's something that each one of us has to answer for ourselves.

That is a question that *you* have to answer for yourself.

Would you join me in prayer?

Lord, put us in the path of what you are doing in this world. Show us where You are working. Let us work there, too. Run us over with Your Presence. Guide our paths in faithful discipleship. Amen.