

Ordinary 29C - 2022

Robert Dykstra talks about the value of preachers playing with a scripture as an infant might play with a spatula and do things one ought not do with spatulas. But it's all part of the game. The need to play stays with us into adulthood. Seeing the widow as an image of God probably isn't what the author intended (which would need to be acknowledged in a sermon), but neither does it seem to me to be out of the realm of playful possibilities someone might engage in with this scripture. God as a pest who pesters us for justice... that sounds like a picture of the God revealed (and hidden) in the Bible.

Everybody prays whether they think of it as praying or not. The odd silence you fall into when something very beautiful is happening or something very good or very bad. The ah-h-h! that sometimes floats up out of you as out of a Fourth of July crowd when the sky-rockets burst over the water. The stammer of pain at somebody else's pain, the stammer of joy at somebody else's joy. Whatever words or sounds you use for sighing with over your own life. These are all prayers in their way. These are all spoken not just to yourself but to something even more familiar than yourself and even more strange than the world.

According to Jesus, by far the most important thing about praying is to keep at it. The images he uses to explain this are all rather comic, as though he thought it was rather comic to have to explain it at all. He says God is like a friend you go to to borrow bread from at midnight. The friend tells you in effect to drop dead, but you go on knocking anyway until finally he gives you what you want so he can go back to bed again (Luke 11:5-8). Or God is like a crooked judge who refuses to hear the case of a certain poor widow, presumably because he knows there's nothing much in it for him.

But she keeps on hounding him until finally he hears her case just to get her out of his hair (Luke 18:1-8). Even a stinker, Jesus says, won't give his own child a black eye when he asks for peanut butter and jelly, so how all the more will God when his children...(Matt. 7:9-11).

Be importunate, Jesus says—not, one assumes, because you have to beat a path to God's door before he'll open it, but because until you beat the path maybe there's no way of getting to your door. "Ravish my heart" John Donne wrote. But God will not usually ravish. He will only court. (by Frederick Buechner from *Wishful Thinking*, pp. 70-71)

Maybe all the widow wanted was a 'connection' with the judge, some assurance that he

heard her, and would respond. Maybe all she wanted was another human to recognize her humanity. A relationship. Maybe what Jesus is saying is that in our persistence in praying to God, that 'connection' is made, sustained, matured, whatever. And by being so dogged, we begin to see that we have a relationship with One to whom we can bring our deepest fears and our most shallow questions. A relationship.

Prayer Power:

Some years ago, *Guideposts* magazine printed a remarkable story. It was about a young high school teacher named Mary. She wanted so much to succeed as a teacher. But a student named Bill was turning her into a nervous wreck. One morning, before school began, Mary was sitting at her classroom desk writing something in shorthand. Suddenly Bill appeared at the door. "What are you writing?" he asked as he approached her desk, "I'm writing a prayer to God," she said, "Can God read shorthand?" he joked. "He can do anything," said Mary, "even answer this prayer." Then she tucked the prayer inside her Bible and turned to write on the chalkboard. As she did, Bill slipped the prayer from her Bible into his typing book.

Twenty year later Bill was going through a box of his belongings that his mother had stored in her attic. He came across his old typing book. Picking it up, he began to thumb through it. Lo and behold, he found the shorthand prayer. It was yellow and faded with age. Bill stared at the jottings on the paper and wondered what they said. He took the prayer and put it in his wallet. When he got to his office, he gave the prayer to his secretary to decipher. She read it and blushed. "It's rather personal," she said. "I'll type it out and put it on your desk when I leave tonight."

That night Bill read the prayer. It said: "**Dear God, don't let me fail this job.** I can't handle my class with Bill upsetting it. Touch his heart. He's someone who can become either **very good or very evil.**" The final sentence hit Bill like a hammer. Only hours before, he had been contemplating making a decision that would commit him to a life of evil. During the next week Bill took the prayer out several times to read it.

To make a long story short, that prayer caused Bill to change his mind about doing what he was contemplating. Weeks later Bill located his old teacher and told her how her prayer had changed his life.

(Mark Link in Sunday Homilies). (<https://frtonyshomilies.com/>).