

Interrupting Silence: Speaking Out Against Injustice





Speaking Truth to Power

In this class we will look at one of the clearest examples of public witness in the Bible. We will consider further the connection between our spiritual lives and our lives in the world.

Establishment Clause of the First Amendment



"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

The Christian Life and Public Affairs Are Connected



“The separation of Christian life from public affairs creates an artificial boundary between the church and state; it also makes an artificial boundary between our faith and the world.

Christianity is not an individualistic faith; rather, Christians are called to live in community and to be active in the world in ways that witness to our faith in all areas of our lives.”

--Rebecca Todd Peters and Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty

The Parable of the Judge and the Widow



“In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my opponent.’

For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, ‘Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.’”

And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to God’s chosen ones who cry to the Lord day and night? Will God delay long in helping them? I tell you, God will quickly grant justice to them.

And yet, when the Son of Humanity comes, will he find faith on earth?”

--(Luke 18:1–8)

The Judge Is Indifferent



In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people.

Injustice Is Challenged



In that city was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.'

The Widow Is Persistent



because this widow keeps
bothering me



The Judge Grants Justice



I will grant her justice, so that
she may not wear me out by
continually coming



The Promise of a Better World

The widow was seeking justice in her present life.

In this parable, God's promise of a better world on earth is evoked.



Listen to the Unjust Judge

And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to God’s chosen ones who cry to the Lord day and night? Will God delay long in helping them? I tell you, God will quickly grant justice to them.

The crucial message to the disciples is that they must be persistent and not lose heart.

Prayer Is the Antidote to Discouragement



Jesus uses the widow as the model of prayer—an active, unrelenting force for justice.

Prayer is the way to remain courageous, and to avoid losing heart.



Main Points Reviewed

1. The social/political/economic system is indifferent to individual and minority group suffering
2. Injustice to the vulnerable is often integral to the structure of society itself and viewed by its members as normal
3. For injustice to be corrected, it must be voiced persistently; persistence forces attention to the truth of the situation which must eventually be acknowledged
4. The promise of a better world offered by God is evoked
5. Persistent prayer guards against discouragement and defeat



OASIS Protocols for Breakout Rooms and General Discussion: A review

- Assign spokesperson/note taker at beginning of breakout session
- Ensure all participants have a chance to speak (if they want to speak)
- Be respectful in considering and giving feedback to new or different views
- When possible, a team member may be present in each breakout room to provide support

Discussion Questions



1. In the parable, the woman spoke her truth to the powerful judge. How did he view what she had to say? How might her speech and actions have been viewed by the people in society whose lives were secure? How might they have been viewed by the people who shared her vulnerability?
2. How we perceive the act of speaking truth to power may depend on where we stand in society. What examples can you think of where one person's "truth" might be seen differently by someone else, as say, betrayal? How do we discern what is "truth"?
3. In the parable, the widow's persistence is key to receiving justice. Where have you seen faithful persistence in the face of injustice?

Jesus Asks



And yet, when the Son of
Humanity comes, will he find
faith on earth?

The Widow Embodies Profound, Radical Faith



In this context, faith consists in the resolve to seek justice. Faith is both the **conviction that justice can be accomplished and the refusal to accept injustice.**

What is clear is that faith is not a cognitive or creedal matter. **It is rather a deep conviction that justice on the ground can be acquired,** but it requires the breaking of silence before every indifferent judge, on earth and in heaven.

--Brueggemann



Obedience to God

Even though we are bound to submit to the authority of a government, God still gets our primary allegiance. **“Obedience to the government should never lead us away from obedience to God”.**

-- John Calvin

Disturbers of Governments



Disturbing governments is in our DNA as Presbyterians, from the Gospels all the way through the social witness that thrives in faith communities today.

We Are Workers in God's Vineyard



Our work for justice reflects Jesus' own righteousness in the world. **Because we live, move, and have our being in God** (Acts 17:28), nothing we do is apart from God.

Thus, our work for justice reflects God's radiance—we are not the source. We are not stars, like the sun. We are workers in God's vineyard, and we do our best to create a just world to reflect God's intentions.”

Discussion Questions



1. Within the context of this story, Brueggemann defines faith not as a cognitive or creedal matter but rather a deep conviction that justice on the ground can be acquired. What is your reaction to this way of defining “faith”?
2. The widow in the story was challenging what the society viewed as normal. Brueggemann comments that the great temptation of the church is the acceptance of normalcy. How does business as usual/what is normal result in harm to vulnerable people in our society? How might our view of what we consider normal interfere with our ability to imagine and work for what God envisions?
3. Can you recall a situation where you felt compelled to speak what you believed to be the truth, even though you expected it wasn't going to be well received? Share that experience with the group.