

**Sermon: 2019/10/20 (19th Sunday after Pentecost, Year C) -
Jeremiah 31:27-34; Psalm 119:97-104; 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5; & Luke
18:1-8**

_BTR

[Invite children to the front.]

So, the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem happened.

Yikes, it was bad:

There was hardly anyone left!

The people had (nearly) *all* been dragged off to Babylon to live in squalor.

Everybody: The king, the priests, the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel.

And the boy, Daniel...

And the temple - the temple Solomon built - was burned down.

Including, inside, its library of precious books: the books of *The Law*.

They even stole the Ark of the Covenant!

Which had the Ten Commandments.

And so the people became VERY worried: How will we "Know the Lord now?!"

They asked each other: [Jer. 31:34].

"How will we know what He wants us to do?"

Well, God gave Jeremiah a vision - a vision of a time - *our* time - when men and women, boys and girls, would have a special advantage in regard to these issues: CHRISTIANS!

Where does this "special advantage" come from?

Well, when we're baptised (with water) [Spray kids], the Holy Spirit comes too!

[Sprinkle them with glitter.]

He's our special advantage.

We just need to pay attention.

Let's pray:

Lord God, ..., in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

[Dismiss children.]

An uncaring judge, in Jesus' day, was like a dishonest politician in ours.

Sadly all. Too. Common.

Almost as if by definition.

Like a bad joke; part of the job description.
Tragic.

They didn't necessarily have a courthouse; a permanent seat somewhere.
Not in Judea-Palestine; not in Galilee - those *far-flung* Roman provinces where Jesus lived.

They were almost...well, "nomadic," outside of the biggest cities, that is:
Most traveled from town to town;
and when they arrived, they'd book a room in the nicest hostel, and then "set up shop" to hear *every* case in that place that they could, in quick succession; that's *all* of those messy, complicated situations that had been mounting up since the last time that they'd been there:
the process was, then, relentless, like swimming against a tidal-wave.
Swimming against a tidal-wave whilst trying to make careful moral judgements about "right" and "wrong;" innocent or guilty.

Imagine yourself in that position.
Imagine the "compassion-fatigue" you'd develop *and the actual fatigue too*, obviously.
Long days of listening to lawyers argue and finagle;
hearing the same lies and excuses over and over and over.
The only thing that might have helped to make it worthwhile was the bribes.

And Jesus tells a parable about one of these judges, who was refusing to hear the case involving 'a widow'. Why? Because, as a 'widow', she was poor: couldn't afford to pay for the judges fee *or* to "grease his palm."
But what did she do in the face of his indifference?
She "kept" 'bothering [him]'.
She just wouldn't "drop it."
Like a wasp at a picnic.
Or a mosquito at a BBQ.
So, to stop her pestering, he eventually 'grant[s] her justice'.

And God is *nothing* like this!
That's the point of the lesson.
Don't misunderstand.
Jesus wasn't *comparing* God with the Judge, He was *contrasting* Him.
God wants to help because it is His very *nature* to do so:
Just think back to chapter 11 in *Luke*, which we heard a couple of weeks ago - we were told that 'Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give...?'

In that instance, of course, Jesus was speaking, specifically, of the gift of the Holy Spirit, but the underlying point was the *intrinsic* generosity of our Heavenly Father. Yes, He will one day judge, but His first "instinct" is for mercy. And it is with exactly that fact in mind that we're commanded to be persistent. Not in all things, of course! Specifically, most importantly, to be persistent in praying.

And that's an easy thing to say, of course, but *very* hard in practice: For one of the realities of prayer is a widely-shared experience of what *seems* like Divine silence, yes? We Christians think of prayer - *rightly* - as a conversation with God, and so it is disconcerting that many of us experience that supposed conversation as a monologue - *our* monologue. And that impression is *very* dissuasive to our being persistent. That is to say, because it *feels* like my petitions and entreaties to Heaven fall on "deaf ears," I eventually give up. I "throw in the towel." I stop asking, (and take matters into my own hands, with mixed results.) And so, in other words, my prayer-life *diminishes*; it "evaporates." It becomes more of a weekly, Sundays-only behavior, where I go "through the motions" more out of a sense of duty than because I *really* believe in what I'm doing. I come to doubt the value of prayer; to question its usefulness.

Is this just me?
Or am I speaking for others here too?
Let's be honest.
Nobody, regularly picking up the phone when it rings, would enjoy finding that there wasn't anyone on the other end, right?
You've just sat down to watch "the game."
Or, you were just settled in the bath, and then there it goes!
Vibrating, the screen lit up, that little green symbol dancing bouncing up and down.
And you rush to grab it, but, too late, whoever they were, they've hung up.
If that kept happening, you'd be *furious*!
And if that's analogous for how praying has been for you, you'd be become quickly despondent.
And you'd certainly not be inclined to do as Jesus says to do to His disciples.

But - and here's my question to you - what if we're *mis*-interpreting the appearance of one-sidedness when we pray?
What if we're misconstruing not hearing an obvious voice "on the other end" of

our appeals to God?

Silence, you see, need not mean indifference.

Not necessarily.

In fact, what if not hearing His voice, audibly, in my ear, is because He is listening to me - *and to the world(!)* - so very *intently*?

What if *that* is the truth?

(Or at least part of it.)

Consider, when I'm speaking to a person - to Matt Feno at Collins River over a beer, for example, or at the dinner-table to Poppy and Rebekah - I take it as a mark of respect; of courtesy if my partner in that dialogue doesn't continually interrupt me, but, rather, is quiet and thoughtful.

In fact, as a pastor, in the Church office, I often, *many* times, find myself just listening and hardly saying anything!

Which is interesting, really, because many might think that my job is all about "The Gob." (With a "b." That's good ol' Yorkshire slang, that is.)

That I'm a professional speaker.

But, you know, my role is equally about allowing somebody to "open-up."

To *hear* them.

As they expose their "soul," their troubles and griefs.

And sometimes there just. Aren't. Words.

What is required is making them my focus; my unspoken world.

My question again, then, re-phrased, is: "What if what I think is *His* silence is actually Him - *the Creator!* - in deep concentration, focusing on me, His humble creation, intently listening?"

Wow, that's a thought.

Let's take a moment to reflect.