

February 2, 2020 Casting Cares Luke 18:1-8

One of my favourite worship choruses has to do with our prayer life. It is called The Cares Chorus. It is only 5 lines long. Some of the talking heads in the church do not like these little choruses and see them as the weak sisters to real hymns. I admit I have always disagreed, and life threatening illness has increased my conviction that many of these very short choruses are really significant to the faith journey. If it is meaningful I take it seriously.

The Cares Chorus is clearly not a message between believers. It is poignantly clear that the direction of the conversation being sung is vertical, not horizontal. It is not a teaching tool for the Church, it is a prayer tool between those who sing it and the Lord our God. "I cast all my cares upon YOU. I lay all of my burdens down at your feet, And any time that I don't know, what to do, I will cast all my cares upon YOU." The original published version of this little gem of a chorus, proclaimed it was based on the 7th verse of the 5th chapter of the 1st letter from the disciple Peter, the first leader of the Church, and its leader in a time of persecution.

I am reading to you verses 6 and 7, of 1st Peter 5 to put that verse in context. "Humble yourselves therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that HE may exalt you in due time: (here is verse 7) casting all your care upon HIM, for HE cares for you." The chorus, the Cares Chorus, is a reiteration of that piece of Biblical wisdom about prayer. I mention that because

Jesus taught the disciples by telling them a story. And apparently the disciples understood what the story was about and why Jesus told it to them. So widely known was that reasons that Luke begins the episode by telling us, Jesus told the disciples this story “to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not faint.” (Luke 18:1) And yes I just quoted that verse out of the King James Version. The NIV is very faithful to that old translation. “Jesus told this parable to show them (the disciples, believers who followed Jesus) that they should always pray and not give up.”

Rightly understood, that message means more than that prayer is important. It should seem like, look like, feel like we are always praying. And it should be apparent to those who are close to us that we pray because we are serious about being Jesus followers, and that when we do not seem to get what we are asking for, when answer to our prayers does not come easy or quickly....we do not give up. We keep praying. And then we pray some more. Because what Jesus teaches us is that prayer is part of the way of life of faith in God. We understand HE is powerful. More powerful than any force in the world. And even more fundamental, we understand HE cares about us, our lives, our challenges, our pain. He cares!

The story is a simple one. There was a widow. This widow wanted justice. She had a grievance that was real. She appealed to the legal system in Israel for help. The worst thing possible occurred. The judge assigned to her case, was the judge no one wants to appear before. He did not fear God.

And he did not care what men thought of him or his rulings. Think about that. He has been appointed a judge. He wields real power over the lives of those who come before him. But he does not fear God.

What that means is that when it comes to the standards of the law his attitude is that there are no absolutes. There is no such thing as right. There is no such thing as wrong. As I said, this is the judge that no one with a just cause wants to have deciding their case. His respect for the law itself is minimal. But as if that were not bad enough, this judge also does not care what men think about him. And in that statement Jesus has chosen his words very carefully. It is about gender. This judge does not care what men think about him. Women do not even deserve...consideration. This widow does not have a chance. Or at least that is what we are meant to think.

Here is a little tid-bit of history. Judea is occupied by the armies of Rome. Rome through their puppet king, Herod, appoints judges. Rome's attitude toward Judea is that these Jews are weird. They do not seem to understand they are a conquered people. Nor do they accept that their conquerors are Gentiles. They keep acting as if they had some sort of say about how their province is operated. And Herod while technically a Jew has played his cards to end up on the side of the winners. He is Rome's man.

In 2 Chronicles 19:5-7 we are told that King Jehoshaphat appointed the judges. He told them that the fear of the Lord should be upon them, that they should do their work carefully, that they should dispense justice, and not accept bribes. In the time of Jesus things had changed radically. In Jerusalem judges were called...Dayyaneh Gezeroth: "judges of prohibitions or punishments. The rabbis saw things clearly. They created a pun on those words. They referred to the judges as Dayayyaneh Gezeloth... "judges of thievery". To put it simply, they perverted justice because they took bribes...all they could get. The Talmud speaks of village judges who would sell their judgement in cases for a dish of meat. Pay for their dinner, and you would get the result you wanted. (B. T. Baba Kamma 114a)

Back to the parable in Luke 18. Clearly this widow has come up against such a judge. But she is a feisty lady. She keeps coming back to the judge. She refuses to accept his brutish ways. The judge realizes at some point that this woman simply will not give up. She does not seem to realize she has been bested by the system. She is a Jewess of Jesus time. She does not recognize that her land has been conquered by Gentiles. The judge recognizes she is bad for his health. She will wear him out. So...in spite of the facts that he does not fear God or man...he does the right thing in her case. He gives her justice.

Make no mistake. Jesus is not comparing the Lord God to the bad judge. He is showing that even in a world that is

not mindful of God, or men, a widow can get justice. Jesus point is that believers, HIS followers should pray, the way this woman fought injustice. Pray, and do not give up! Cast all your cares on Jesus who is the Lord. Why? Because this God who is revealed in the Christ cares for you.

And here is the lesson we learn from observing what happens when Jesus prays. He goes off to lonely places, quiet places, to the wilderness which is more akin to desert than anything else, and there HE talks with HIS heavenly Father. He does it continually. It is HIS way. It is HIS secret strength and the source of HIS healing power. Jesus does not leave prayer until the moment or the time when HE is in trouble. In fact reading between the lines, we get the impression that Jesus taught what HE taught, and did what HE did, including accepting the cross of Calvary, because HE prayed in quiet places and quiet moments. Sometimes HE rose early and went for a walk that put distance between HIMSELF and the disciples. It is noteworthy that when the disciples find Jesus at prayer, they often remind HIM there is work to be done, need to be met. But Jesus knows best. HE prays and then decides what HE is going to do. HE prays and then commits to time and effort. HE never gets the cart before the horse, which is why HIS crucifixion and resurrection are not parts of a tragedy, but the ultimate act of love on the part of the God who cares for you and cares for me.

One of the mistakes we make is that we keep our cares to ourselves. I make that mistake as much as anyone.

Again, I can tell you all the good reasons I have for making that mistake...which means I try to justify the way I do things. Too often we leave prayer to the margins of our work and our witness. Jesus wanted the believers around HIM to learn a lesson. To seek God's face in prayer before cares became burdens, and then to not give up praying when the load was heavy. It is a big lesson. And the indicators point in this direction: even St. Peter (remember the word saint means believer, follower, disciple) even St. Peter had to learn that lesson at great personal cost. But in the end he adds his words to those of our Lord and Saviour. Cast all your cares on HIM, because HE cares for you.

Let us pray;

Lord hear us when we pray. Comfort us with your Spirit. As disciples help us to commit more time and more effort to the priority of prayer. Remind us that we will only grasp how much time you spend on us, as we spend more time with you. We pray this in YOUR holy name. Amen