

Voices: Justice looks like a widow not giving up

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EDITOR'S NOTE: "Justice looks like ..." is a special series in the Voices column. Readers will have the opportunity to consider justice from numerous viewpoints. The series is based on each writer's understanding of Scripture and relationship with Jesus Christ. Writers present their own views independent of any institution, unless otherwise noted in their bios.

You are encouraged to listen to each writer without prejudice. Then, engage in conversation with others around you about what justice looks like to you.

[Click here](#) for more information about the series. [Click here](#) to read the full "Justice looks like..." series.

One of the most perplexing parables about the kingdom of God is found in Luke 18:1-8, where Jesus, teaching his disciples to pray, uses the example of a widow and a judge who can't be bothered to wake up.

The widow, Jesus tells us, is up against an arbiter of justice who loved neither God nor others, a man asleep to both the origins of justice in the world and to humanity. Jesus tells his disciples to pray like this widow—repetitively, persistently, openly.

Eventually, the widow gets the justice she seeks, the justice she is owed. There is no indication in the parable that her complaint is unwarranted, only that the judge is slow to answer her and, even then, does so out of exasperation. But what is so unsettling about the parable is the judge here

is an analogy for *God*.

Wondering if the judge is asleep

You don't need to read very far into the Psalms to see this sentiment is close to Israel's heart. There, God is the one who has promised deliverance and justice, but the question always lingers. Maybe God has forgotten them, put them off, or—worst of all—remains asleep to our claims entirely.

Perhaps exile will be forever, our enemies will swallow us like the grave, and even our memories will be papered over. The gods of security, safety and Mammon have set up shop all around us, and the powers of death and injustice win so frequently. The Psalms know this.

Our complaints for justice are very real complaints, and deserve to be taken seriously, but the arc of justice moves so slowly. We live in a world where bread is needed daily; so, we pray for it daily, but the wheat will not be hurried.

Trusting the judge is awake

I do not think it is the case that God forgets us or loses track of us, but that the nights are very, very long. And in this parable, Jesus makes no move to defend the judge or to apologize that justice is slow in coming to the widow who deserves it.

What is shocking to us is Jesus encourages his disciples to keep asking, and not to be silent: "And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:7-8).

The disciples are to be those who, in faith, continue to ask for God to be

true to the promises of God, even when it seems as if the judge is asleep. The Psalms knew this well. The people of God keep asking, keep pushing, keep speaking the promises of God back to God.

For God is the only one who can give justice, and God is the one who Scripture tells us will continue to give justice, even when it seems all is lost. Being God's people means we are the people encouraged to keep asking for it, long after the night has come and those around us would rather we be quiet and go to sleep, as well.

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