
The sermon text for today is based on the Gospel, Luke Chapter 18 verses 1 to 8.

Provided by The Lutheran Church of Australia

Shameless Faith

And Jesus told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.' " And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:1-8 ESV).

There are two shameless characters in this parable.

There is the judge who doesn't care one bit about God or the people around him. He's "the judge" and as far as he's concerned the buck stops with him. He's his own entity; no one tells him what to do or how to do his job. He believes he's got absolute power to decide over the cases that come before him. Whether he vindicates or condemns is of no consequence to him.

One might see him as an arrogant character, admiring nothing or no one but himself. And rightly so, as he considers himself totally blameless being the way he is. He felt no shame in who he was, nor was he ashamed in any way of what he did before God or anyone else.

Then there's the widow. There could be no greater distinction made between two persons or their social status than between the judge who truly believed he was all powerful and the widow who painfully knew she was nothing.

Although this lowly woman was righteous, her righteousness and need for justice was of no concern to the judge. Her righteousness and call to be vindicated wouldn't have made much of a stir amongst others who prided themselves on righteousness either,

especially those who righteously followed all the religious requirements in a Jewish community.

However, the widow, unlike the religious righteous, shamelessly goes before the judge to plead her case over and over again. She fights to preserve the most basic essence of righteousness, a righteousness most took for granted. This was a righteousness of common decency where one could expect right defined from wrong in the most basic distinction and preservation of human life. So in a bid to save what little honour she has, she puts every scrap of basic dignity aside to shamelessly plead her case before the judge

This widow approaches the judge. She has nothing to lose. She has no standing, no greater righteousness to uphold. And so she pursues the judge for this most basic righteousness. But one which will label her a justified widow!

For the other righteous people in the community to approach a judge that cares nothing for their righteousness would be completely shameful. It would mean their righteousness was lacking, that they too would have no standing before the judge. They would have been perceived weak and lowly like the widow before a judge who had no fear of God or respect for those whose strength and position was measured by their righteousness – what they did or didn't do.

We must notice a difference here between the widow and others who considered themselves righteous. As Jesus relates this parable to his disciples, he teaches them to be shameless like the widow, rather than conceited like the Pharisees and teachers of the Law. He wants the disciples to pursue a righteous outside themselves; a fundamental righteousness which gives ultimate justification. But unfortunately this righteousness is lost on most of humanity because we are led to believe in a righteousness that comes from our own actions.

The religious righteous sought to do the right thing, and for the most part they did a very good job, they were very righteous! In fact, Jesus says elsewhere, For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:20 ESV)

But Jesus calls the disciples, like the widow in the parable, to shamelessly do something better. And we who are called to see this difference too, are called to shamelessly do something better.

Jesus tells this parable to his disciples just after he speaks about the coming of the Kingdom of God. He encourages the disciples to not lose hope as they wait. He calls them to a posture of prayer; to approach God with persistence and persevere in prayer; to endure as the widow did before the judge. His call is to lay aside any pride which has grown from a righteousness of doing the right thing, and pursue a righteousness that justifies them before God.

Like the judge in the parable God is shameless. But unlike the unrighteous judge in the parable God is compassionate and merciful; he is shamelessly righteous towards those who trust him enough to cast off their self-righteousness and look to him to be vindicated and set free from their adversary.

So when Jesus returns will he find faith here on earth? Will he find faith amongst us? Do you trust God? Are you prepared to throw off your own righteousness and trust his righteousness? God is calling all of us to come home and be freed from the adversity of sin and death.

God's will for you, is for you to allow your heart to be softened and daily moulded into truly righteous people; people that possess the life-changing power of God! People that persevere and endure hardship in this life in the known hope of something much better to come. He wants your heart to be transformed, moulded and moved, and made one with his heart.

God calls you to shamelessly lay aside the things of this life and the limited power we possess in ourselves and call on his name in prayer. He calls us to join in with Christ, to participate with him in his work of prayer, just as he does right now before the Father, and as he did while he was here on earth as he walked to the cross.

Let God's faithfulness and righteousness justify you before him. Let your hope lead you away from a righteousness that gains status before men, but into a righteousness that truly justifies you before God.

We are shrewd enough to perform in a way where our actions are righteously dressed in the appropriate churchy garb, but are we shameless enough to cast it off and seek God's kingdom and his righteousness? Are we prepared to trust God, uphold his actions, what he did for us on our cross? Are we shameless enough to admit it is your cross, and allow him to vindicate us and continue letting him fulfil all righteousness in each one of us?

It's not about what we do – good or bad? Either can be as bad as the other when we allow them to be in the middle of what we're about. God cares little for us striving to do good. But also thinking we can do bad just demonstrates our thinking is completely wrong.

God calls us to be shameless enough to focus on what Jesus, our true brother, has done, and what the Holy Spirit is doing today. This is the good that God seeks; this is the faith Jesus wants to find when he returns; and this is the righteousness into which the Holy Spirit continually leads.

Let Jesus stand in the centre, he is in the middle. Being Christ centred is the only way; this is the truth; this is the life to which you have been called. Be shameless in a way that surrenders anything you do, be it good or bad, and hold onto him who truly justifies you.

Let the Holy Spirit mould and move you into something new, each day, and every day. Don't give up hope, Christ is coming.

When he comes will he find you faithfully looking to him, repenting, seeking his righteousness? Will he find faith, like that of the widow, which selflessly shamelessly longs to be in the Father's eternal presence?

Definitely - yes! Definitely – Amen!

And the righteousness of God which surpasses all human emotion, understanding and righteousness keep our hearts and minds centred on Christ Jesus our Saviour.
Amen.