

**“Listening”, a sermon based on Luke 18:1-8 preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on 24 March 2019.**

It's a strange parable if we imagine God is like an unjust judge who needs to be cajoled into giving justice.

Equally it is a strange parable if we imagine God always giving justice quickly.

Both are evidently untrue.

In life sometimes justice happens slowly and sometimes justice happens quickly.

In life we sometimes slowly come to the point of being able to hear what others say and sometimes we come quickly to the point of being able to hear them.

Over the last week, both have happened.

What people have been saying for years has finally been heard, in the saddest of circumstances.

What has taken years and years of talking, now is quickly to happen.

Gun control.

And in any moment we don't know which it will be - will what people say take time to be heard, will what people say be heard quickly and acted on quickly?

So the gospel reading begins ...

“Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.”

The example he uses is a widow crying out for justice.

A widow.

One least likely to be heard.

One most likely to be silenced.

One least expected to speak God's truth.

God the widow, at the edge saying ... can you hear me.

Arundhati Roy said “There's really no such thing as the voiceless. There are only the deliberately silenced or the preferably unheard.”

Sometimes we are full and there is no space to hear.

Full of emotion, full of fear, full of theology, full of certainty, full of ... ?

Sometimes we are empty and there is no energy to hear.

Often there is both, we are both full and empty at the same time.

I know many people have felt like that – exhausted.

Prayer makes space for us to hear, to hear God, to hear the widow, whoever the widow might be.

We are being invited to listen to Muslim voices.

The voice of the chair of the local Islamic Association on Thursday night.

The voice of recent immigrants.

A Muslim call to prayer rang across the stadium on Thursday night, surely a call for us to pray.

To pray as neighbour, to pray loving our neighbour.

As with the widow, some of what we are hearing has been said for a long time and we have not heard it.

The Islamic Women's Council of New Zealand has set out what they have been saying for five years about the rise of alt-right extremism.

Dame Susan Devoy has told the similar story.

We have heard of Muslim women in Dunedin being spat at and their hijabs torn off.

We have heard experiences of migrant people in New Zealand, people in our own congregation, facing discrimination.

Prayer makes space for us to hear the widow.

Prayer provides calm inside for us to hear the widow.

Prayer enables us to listen even in our fullness and our emptiness, in our exhaustion.

Prayer as sitting in silence in the company of Christ.

Prayer as praying in sleeplessness in the middle of the night.

Prayer enables us to keep on listening.

Not giving up on making space for the voice of the widow.

The voices I have found hardest to hear over the last week have not been those of Muslim people, but of Christian people struggling to come to terms with being part of a multi-religious society.

Christian people struggling to pray alongside people who are Muslim or of any other faith.

Christian people who feel that to acknowledge the place of Muslim faith in New Zealand undermines the place of Christianity in New Zealand.

There is a discussion to be held within the Christian community.

Prayerfulness ... quietness ... space ... listening for the voices we tune out.

Prayer

Gracious God, by day and night, we pour out prayer to you. We cry out for justice, yearn for what is right, long for your peace. Come quickly to help us, God.

We see hateful violence and senseless killing and we cry out, how long O God.

We sense seeds of distrust and hatred and we cry out, how long O God

We know our history of faiths being pitted against each other and the carnage of it, and we cry out, how long O God

We feel how easy it is to turn against others and we cry out, how long O God

We struggle to challenge views and actions that do not represent your love, and we cry out, how long O God.

We cherish every act of forgiveness, every loving embrace, every openhearted peaceful welcome, every voice from the edge that reveals more of your truth.

Gracious God, we pray for your justice to roll down like waters and your righteousness like an ever flowing stream.

Replenish our strength and stir up our hope as we look for signs of your coming reign.

And fill us with the peace that passes understanding, the deep peace of Christ, in whose holy name we pray. Amen.

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*called to be a community of Jesus*



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