

Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost – 2022

Genesis 32:22-30

2 Timothy 3:14—4:5

Luke 18:1-8

Is quitting contagious? I've often heard college or professional football players say that they knew that they had won the game, far before it was actually over, when they saw in the eyes of their opponents that they had quit. If the person next to you quits, what does that do to your morale? In wartime, deserters were shot on the field of battle. Why is that?

No one ever quits a hot fudge sundae (at least I never have). No one quits a meal because the beer is too cold or the steak is too thick. No one ever quits when they are ahead. Hubert Humphrey, a mid-century politician, said this: "Some people look upon any setback as the end. They're always looking for the benediction rather than the invocation.... But you can't quit. That isn't the way our country was built." Do you agree?

As a university freshman, every class that I began to do poorly in I would withdraw. I quit. The gym is always full in January, not so much at the end of February. Have you ever been engaged in an endeavor with a whiny wingman? Sadly, my own mouth has uttered such drivel in the past so forgive me for bringing up someone else's less-than-stellar moment. Me and the boys were climbing Three Finger Jack in Oregon and a nephew whined pretty much the whole way. Some fun *that* was. The seed of quitting germinates in a heart that engages in self-pity.

Is Jesus concerned about Christians quitting? Today's parable seems to say so. "And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1). It's about justice. Do Christians love justice? Do you have a keen sense of justice? Where did that come from? Has your sense of justice ever suffered a setback? Have you seen injustice in the land, in your life, in holy history? Here's a pertinent quote from the First Century Greek philosopher Plutarch: "The mills of justice grind exceedingly slowly; but they grind exceedingly fine." What's the point? Patience! Justice will triumph.

The hero of the parable is a widow woman. She has no resources. She can't hire a fancy Harvard grad for a lawyer. She can't pad the judge's wallet. She can't marshal the local union to bring political force to bear on the judge. What does she have? Persistence; and she uses it.

The judge knows the righteousness of her cause. How do I know? Because he said: "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" (Luke 18:4). He relents. He does what is right. Not because he is good, not because he sees the inherent value of righting a wrong, but because he wants to be left alone. The widow woman is the hero. She is so focused, so intent, so determined to claim a reality that is genuinely hers that she ceaselessly places her plea in the ear of the godless judge. A widow woman, an insignificant creature in the eyes of ancient culture, she exerts a marvelous influence over a fellow who is in a position that he doesn't deserve, literally a judge who has no conscience. What is God telling us?

What do you see in the world around us? Do you see a secular culture that wants Christians to heel to their atheistic boot? Do you see ancient wisdom being jettisoned because those with civil authority simply despise Christian precepts? Do you see injustice? Have we suffered setbacks in the last fifty years? Are more on the way? Is our character being tested? Does Christianity promise you a rose garden? Who is in charge? Does He love justice? Is it coming? Is a day of justice coming?

We need to see more than just what's in front of us. One day of justice ought to be ripe in your mind in every season. You are the felon. God has every right to punish me, punish you. We have transgressed His will and proudly thumped our chest in His courtroom. The mill of God's justice has ample evidence to grind up back into ashes and dust (Genesis 3:19). Come now, let's have the verdict. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), and this culprit has broken every commandment, violated every Godly principle. What does the Judge say? The soul that sins shall die (Ezekiel 18:20). You are a man of unclean lips and you live among a people of unclean lips (Isaiah 6:5). Loveless, petty, deceitful – I am a felon in the eyes of the law and it accuses me like a relentless prosecuting attorney. Guilty; a poor miserable sinner. For us felons, God sends Justice incarnate.

Conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, Jesus is your clemency. His blood is your bail, the crimson key that unlocks you from the shackles of your sin. Forgiven; that is God's justice. Eternal life; that is what the Judge has given you. The life of His Son. Our false justice convicted Him. Jesus was innocent and yet He was nailed to a tree. He willed to venture there. On the cross the Lord Christ became the greatest and only felon that ever lived – God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). Your guilty verdict fell on Him and He submitted. And God's justice was poured out on our substitute. "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:17). "Vengeance is mine" says the Lord and His anger, His fury over sin was unleashed on Jesus the Christ. The Messiah's righteousness, His justice shone like the noonday sun. "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:54). So said the centurion who witnessed Christ's glory, witnessed His death. Keep that day in your mind as you travel this road to heaven. That is the justice that undergirds all that happens on this planet. That is the justice that will never be undone. That is the justice that informs what will happen on the Last Day.

When He returns, justice will sparkle from coast to coast; every land, every alley, every heart and mind will know what is real and what is illusory. When Justice comes it will be complete; it will come with remarkable finality, it will come with earth-shattering swiftness and it will come with stunning precision. God's Word is real and we have sheltered ourselves in what is real. Justice, truth, and all that is good will pierce sky, earth and soul. We will know. Our enemies will know. Those who pervert justice and those who long for God's definitive voice to be heard – all will know. We are nearer that Day than when we first believed (Romans 13:11). We can do all things through Christ, who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13). His justice strengthens us. An empty tomb speaks of our Father's passion for justice. It is in that wonderful day, in the light of Easter, that you live and move and have your being (Acts 17:28). An empty tomb is our future. We cannot lose heart. We will not lose heart.

He strengthens us with holy food. We do not quit. The mills of justice ground our Lord into wheat, baked Him in the fire of judgment and now He gives you His death and resurrection in the unleavened bread of His body. Justice itself is poured on your tongue as you drink of His blood. Strengthened; you leave this Divine Service strengthened. God's Word is clear; it is through many tribulations that we must enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). In those tribulations, we stand together. Christians throughout the world stand with us and we stand with them. The gates of hell will not prevail against Christ's Mighty Church (Matthew 16:18). We pray; we fight against the sin in our lives; we do not lose heart; we stand upon the truth and justice is our banner. God is not slow to keep His promise (2 Peter 3:9). He sees every single one of us and is far more vested in Justice than any of us or all of us put together. We trust Him. His timing is perfect. We are allied, one to another, and we trust our Father.