

“PROFLIGATE PARTNER”

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Reading: 2 Timothy 3:14 – 4.5

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

Luke 18:1 – 8

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, ‘In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, “Grant me justice against my opponent.” For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, “Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.” ’ And the Lord said, ‘Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he

delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?

May God bless to our understanding these words from the Holy Scriptures.

This story of a poor widow's persistence and tenacity seems especially appropriate for the Sunday of the week in which 33 miners in Chile were brought back to the surface of the earth. Rescued from a gruesome and horrifying death by the combination of their own self-discipline, and the collaborative efforts of mining companies and others from around the world. Two spoonsful of tuna a day. A lot of prayers. Recall just a few of the elements of this story of globalized crisis management: surveillance equipment from Taiwan , video gear from Japan, rescue cable from Germany, a specially skilled technician from Denver, a Canadian drilling rig, coping advice from NASA, and an amazing delivery by UPS. One has a mental picture of the familiar brown truck driving through the desert with a 13 ton drilling tool on board! With one thousand reporters present, from every continent, the story streamed continuously as the whole world watched. There has been some talk about miracles – the second miner to reach the air said, 'I was with God and I was with the Devil – they fought for me and God won.' Even more talk about the relationship of miracles to engineering. Maybe the miracle was the persistence.

The story Jesus tells today seems to confirm this. Perseverance makes a difference. And he goes farther – he says that if the grumpy old judge can grudgingly respond to a no-account widow because of her determination, then God responds to us not grudgingly but overwhelmingly. Not eventually but quickly. Not parsimoniously but profligately.

It's not only here that God is portrayed as profligate. Over the top. Especially in the Gospel of Luke, but elsewhere too, we see this all the time. You take the

inheritance and squander it – and God says welcome home, and throws a huge party. You run out of wine at a wedding – no problem, bring on the water jugs, we can fix that. You want to be a reasonably good person – but Jesus says you have to forgive 70 *times* 7. You kindly offer your coat, he says give the man your shirt too. You try to keep the crowds manageable, and the word is, ‘no, feed them all’. You try to set a respectful atmosphere, Jesus says, ‘no, I want the kids IN. And by the way they are the ones who are in already!’ The kingdom of God? Like a mustard seed, he says, it grows like crazy! There is a kind of craziness to the picture Jesus paints of God – profligate in generosity, a reckless spendthrift in care and compassion, an extravagant responder.

And we want to say, well, okay ...but ... what about the times when it’s *not* like the rescue of the miners in Chile? What about all the other miners we have heard about this year? What can Jesus mean when he makes this claim that God is even more responsive than the judge – that God is quick, and ready. We must have missed something. What about the self-evident fact that the world we live in is for the most part *not* really a place where God’s justice rolls on like a river, nor righteousness like a never-failing stream. What about, in the words of a sweet old children’s hymn, sin and want and sorrow? (*Jesus Bids Us Shine*)

In the last few weeks, at the same time as we have heard reports of the slow but steady progress toward rescue in Chile, we have also heard stories about anti-gay bullying and what seems to be a rash of suicides among young men who find their lives intolerable by it. Adolescence is a tricky and trying time of life for most of us, with its competing needs both for self-definition and for acceptance by peers. The Canadian Mental Health Association reports that suicide is the second leading cause of death among adolescents overall, after traffic accidents. Young people who are perceived to be different are especially vulnerable, and even more vulnerable when that difference has to do with sexuality and sexual orientation. Lines are drawn to stigmatize and exclude. Somebody’s a dog and somebody’s a slut. Somebody’s *gay*. In 2010, victimization and harassment are still widespread, the norm actually, when it comes to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered youth. Bullying and homophobia

abound. This is very bad news, for the sake of everyone – it means that all kids are subjected to a distorted and intolerant environment. A brutalizing environment.

And don't we want to say, wait a minute didn't we already do this? Don't we have rules about this? Didn't things get better over the last thirty years? Here in church, aren't we ourselves a very mixed bag orientation-wise, from baptismal font to funeral planning? And didn't we become an affirming congregation years ago, weren't we the founding headquarters of Affirm? Don't we do as many same sex weddings, as the other kind? Aren't we more or less okay on this one? The answer seems to be well maybe, but there is still work to do. There's a whole world out there and it's God's world. More effort to be made.

It's clear as he tells the story that Jesus likes the persistent widow. He doesn't think of her as a victim, who needs to be saved. He always does this of course – he plays to our strength, not our weakness. Take up your bed and walk, he says to the man on the mat. Feed this girl, she's not dead, he says to Jairus. What do *you want* me to do for you, he asks Bartimaeus. Your faith has made you whole, to the woman who bled so.

But it's not the faith of accomplishment he's looking for. It is the faith of persistence. This is the attitude we are to bring to stewardship here at the church. Not so much, we have to meet the budget, we have to keep the church afloat. What Jesus says is – God's justice is abundantly pouring. There is work to be done and God is already hurrying to help you. God's kingdom is at hand and we are called to participate in it. Called to serve. Work against torture, exert yourself in favour of the environment, speak out about bullying, help the newly arrived strangers in the land, work against poverty here and elsewhere. And in the church, worship and study together and teach your children, so that in the words Dan read, *everyone who belongs to God may become proficient, equipped for every good work. I solemnly urge you, he writes, proclaim the message, be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.* God's justice is flowing and emerging in so many different ways and places in this sorry world of ours – and our

task is to find those places and get on board. Jesus tells us to seek out that Kingdom and serve it. To pull alongside that profligate God and become a partner.

He says that the way to do it is to pray always and not lose heart. Pray extravagantly. Squander your good will into God's hearing. Be reckless in your hopes. Over the top in offering your life. A tireless spendthrift in spreading God's justice. Become God's profligate partner. Amen.