

Green Hill Presbyterian Church  
“The Days Are Surely Coming”  
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Ordinary 29—October 20, 2019

Lessons: Jeremiah 31: 27-34; Luke 18: 1-8.

“The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah... this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup>No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.” The days are surely coming!

Jeremiah spoke those words to a people who were in despair. They knew that the world was not what it should be, and they had lost heart. They knew the old, old story but it didn’t make sense anymore. They were hurting and they felt all alone. They had been taken into exile and that “exile had drained the present of all meaning and hope.<sup>1</sup> Yet precisely in that place of loneliness, hopelessness and despair, God comes calling with a new word: The days are surely coming. People will know how to act, how to live, both the least and the greatest. God isn’t finished with God’s people. God has something new in store. The days are surely coming.

This has been God’s way throughout all history. When Sarah and Abraham had nearly given up hoping that they would have a family, God came calling and Isaac, the child of laughter was born. When Joseph was betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery in Egypt, God used that horror to provide for the people in a time of need. When the people of Israel were groaning under their slavery, it was God who heard their cry and remembered the covenant and sent Moses to deliver the people. When Naomi lost her husband and both her sons, Ruth, thanks be to God, chose not to leave her or to cease from following her, providing Naomi a new family, including Ruth’s grandson King David. Stories like these can be found throughout Scripture. In that place of loneliness and despair, God continues to arrive. The days are surely coming.

There are some people in the church who suggest that we are living in a kind of exile today. We know the stories of how we used to be. Some people here can remember the days when our sanctuaries were full, when everyone came out to lend a hand on clean up days, when people actually read and knew our Scriptures, when tithing was a normal and even expected practice. Today, we all deal with budgets that are tight and needs that are great and the knowledge that for many people Sunday morning is more likely to include a coffee shop and the newspaper or a morning of sleeping in, than the singing of praise and listening for God’s word and some wonder if we will still be here in another fifty or seventy-five years. Sometimes it is hard to sing God’s song in this strange land. And yet, and yet it is precisely here that God continues to speak. I have one friend who likes to point out that the most resilient organization the world has ever known is the church of Jesus Christ. The days are surely coming!

Jesus tells a parable about a woman who knew the reality of exile; a woman who knew the pain of injustice but who also knew the faithfulness of God and so was persistent in her work for justice. It is a story about the need of Jesus’ followers to pray always and not to lose heart. Mark Harris suggests that “we lose heart when we believe that no one cares for us, that no one is on our side taking

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<sup>1</sup> Donald W. Musser, Theological Perspective, Jeremiah 31: 27-34 in Feasting on the Word® Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary; Year C, Volume 4. © 2010 Westminster John Knox Press.

our needs to heart or loving us for who we are and what we have experienced. We lose heart when we feel like we are alone.”<sup>2</sup> A great many people know too well how easy it is to lose heart. Yet the example of the woman in this story is one of perseverance. She believes that the days are surely coming. She knows that God is good all the time and so she does not give up even when the power of injustice is incredibly strong.

Of course, this parable does not rank among the most popular of parables. It’s not like the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son. My great uncle was a federal judge in New York and I gather he did not like this parable at all. Jesus is not trying to suggest that God is like an unjust judge whom we have to bother in order to be heard. This is what might be called a “how much more” parable. If a widow, who by definition has no standing in that society, can persuade an unjust judge to grant her justice, *how much more* can we rely on God! If there is anyone to emulate in this story, emulate the widow. Follow her example of not losing heart, of continuing to hope, of not giving up even though the reality of injustice seems so terribly strong. This is a story about praying regularly and not losing heart.

When you place yourself in God’s presence on a regular on-going basis, there is very little you cannot face. In a time when injustice is all too present, we can continue to rely on God as the source of all our strength. We can discover with the Psalmist that “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” Maggi Dawn writes that “Prayer as Jesus taught it isn’t just a private matter. It’s not personal therapy or a crutch for the weak. Prayer is about refusing to believe that the way things are has to be the way they will always be, about imagining how the world could be, and gaining the wisdom and the energy to bring it about.”<sup>3</sup>

Years ago, Maltbie Babcock wrote the hymn, This is my Father’s World. He was a Presbyterian minister down in Baltimore. One verse of that hymn proclaims: “This is my Father’s world: Oh let me never forget that though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet.” When we pray consistently, we are changed and we discover the steadfast love of our God who gives us strength to carry on.

Jill Duffield, the editor of Presbyterian Outlook marvels at the widows of the world, “the women, like that woman in Luke 18, who refuse to give up on justice, no matter how often, or how violently, or how utterly injustice apparently wins. Their persistence belies all logic. Their tenacity humbles people like me who’ve given up when faced with fewer and lesser odds. I once worked with a woman who drove an ancient powder-blue station wagon that was forever breaking down. Frequently, I would come in to the office and she would tell me that her car was in the shop again. She would have walked to work or gotten a ride, figuring out a way to get to work, get the car fixed, keep going, when options appeared few. If this frustrated her, she never said so. Often, she would share her confidence that a way would be made because God knew she needed that car. Not so much to get to work - she could walk there. Not so much to get around town - the bus route, while limited, could get her the places she needed to go. But because that station wagon was a vehicle for mission and ministry. She transported the neighborhood children in that car to the Boys and Girls Club and then home; to afterschool activities and back; to appointments, cultural events and anywhere else that eased the burden of their parents or enriched their lives. That light-blue car, the one the kids laughed about and called “Ms. Peg’s hoopty”, provided so much more than transportation because those kids in her car were loved and advised, taught and encouraged every inch of the journey. That’s why Ms.

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Harris, Do Not Lose Heart: Luke 18:1-8, The Christian Century, Volume 118 Number 26. September 26, 2001. © 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Maggi Dawn, Prayer Acts: Luke 18:1-8 in The Christian Century, Volume 124 Number 20. October 2, 2007 © 2007.

Peg would lament when the car broke down, even as she stated with unquestionable confidence that soon it would be back on the road.

“Her persistence humbled me, but her hope, her faith, they inspired me. She would not be thwarted from her mission, no matter the odds she faced, no matter the odds faced by the children she so loved and transported. Persistence cannot be uncoupled from a stalwart sense of purpose and a hope that others may see as irrational. Ms. Peg kept that car on the road and those kids in her sphere, year after year, because she believed in them, their worth and potential, and because she put her hope in the God who called her to care for and about them...

“Ms. Peg keeps fixing a car that many would say that involves putting good money after bad, but she knows the pricelessness of what she provides when it is on the road. She keeps the faith, in her passengers and mostly in the one who called her to love them. The patient, persistent, those trained in righteousness, keep practicing that which they know by heart, confident that eventually, even the most corrupt, unjust judges will relent to the unwavering, unstoppable, just will of God.”<sup>4</sup>

In a time when injustice seems to flourish, with violence in our cities and in far-away places, when our neighbors still struggle in the aftermath of terrible hurricanes and our government is in the midst of a great political struggle, we in the church have something to do. We can love God with all we are and love our neighbors as we love ourselves and we are called to pray consistently and not quit because we know that God will grant justice to God’s chosen ones. We know that God will not delay in helping them. The days are surely coming.

Let us pray: O God, you are persistent in love for all your children. Help us to be persistent in our prayer that you might make of us worthy disciples, created in your image. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Jill Duffield, The Presbyterian Outlook, Looking into the Lectionary, 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost