

## ***“Justified by His Word”***

On the Mountain of Transfiguration, God the Father says “Listen to Him” – listen to Jesus. Before the Transfiguration, St. Luke’s Gospel gives a lot of descriptions – but now, having come down the mountain – the text is full of Jesus and His Word.

Another interesting thing about St. Luke’s Gospel is that he gives introductory statements leading into Jesus’ discourses – if you will – giving us a heads up so that we know what we are to listen FOR.

For example, today Luke writes, “He [Jesus] told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.” Listen to Jesus, so that you always pray and do not lose heart.

Always pray ... why? Because prayer is what FAITH IN JESUS does. Such a faith looks to Him – listens to Him – and believes Him, and His Word. And not lose heart ... why? What does this mean?

You know what this means, you experience it all the time as a sinner living in a sin-fallen world. It’s the daily struggle of sinner/saint that Paul speaks of in Romans 7. You are like King David who writes – “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.”

Listening to Jesus today, He tells us an odd parable. It’s odd because the God-figure is a judge who doesn’t fear God, and doesn’t care about what people think.

He’s a pagan. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” He doesn’t “fear, love, and trust” in God above all things – and He doesn’t love his neighbor as himself. He is as ungodly as can be!

Then there’s the widow who is seeking justice against her adversary. She wants the judge to give her justice in her plight against an adversary who is anything but just!

The judge holds all the cards. He refuses her petitions – but the widow keeps coming and pressing the case – until finally, he gives her justice.

What? Why? “So that she will not beat me down by her continual coming,” the judge says. Or, “so that her continual coming doesn't give me a black eye!” So that his reputation isn't ruined!

WELL, when push comes to shove – I guess the judge does care about what people think of him. This widow has him in a headlock – and she won't let him go – until he gives her justice against one who is anything but just.

This judge sure doesn't remind us of God. After all, God does care – about justice – and about you. He is merciful. And you see that if you've been paying attention – watching and following along with Jesus in St. Luke's Gospel – if you have been listening to Him.

In a similar manner, in the Old Testament reading, we think Jacob is wrestling with God – trying to get Him to do something He doesn't really want to do. That's not it at all. Jacob fears that his brother will come and kill him the next day – and it is God who wrestles with him – so that Jacob will “fear, love, and trust” in God above all things – including Esau.

Back to the parable and the widow who seeks vindication – who's hounded by an anti-righteous adversary. This widow (whom God loves and has commanded His people to take care of) – suffers injustice.

Three great enemies torment her daily – the devil, the world, and her own sinful flesh. Her sin is weaponized against her. “You are a sinner” – “you deserve temporal and eternal punishment from God” – “the wages of sin is death.”

She cannot deny the truth. Where is she to go? Is there any hope for justice? She goes to the one who business is justice. And this is where the judge in the parable is like God – for as the psalmist declares – God is “JUSTIFIED in HIS WORDS.”

The God of justice has promised that, for Jesus' sake, this widow's sins are forgiven – that she is “justified by His grace, as a gift.” Because God is just, He must justify this widow – and so, for Jesus' sake, He declares this sinner to be “not guilty.” That is God's justice – for this widow, and “for you.”

What if God were not just? What if He did not keep His Word – refusing to do what He has promised? To go against His own Word would give Him a black eye – and you, the sinner, would not come to Him and plead for justice – you would not entrust your life into His hands – you would not want to hear His verdict.

In other words – you would not listen to Jesus – and you would lose heart – for, you would not “fear, love, and trust” in Him above all things.

Dearly beloved, who are daily tormented and exhausted in heart – the Lord brings justice to you speedily. He vindicates you from your sin and its torment – because Jesus has taken your sin as His own, and shed His blood to atone for the sin of the whole world.

The verdict is PROCLAIMED at the cross when Jesus declares – “It is finished.” The defeat of sin and death is SHOWN FORTH with His third day resurrection. And today, that resurrected Christ BRINGS His justice to you.

To Wesley He declares “not guilty” in the water and His Word of Holy Baptism. “You are free” is what you heard when you listened to His living voice say “I forgive you all your sins.” And with His Holy Body and Blood – your enemies are silenced – and you are vindicated.

This is THE faith He has given to you – so that you always pray and do not lose heart – today, and when He comes again on the Last Day. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.