



Sunday, October 19, 2025

19th Sunday after Pentecost

In 1846, Ignaz Semmelweis, a doctor at a maternity clinic in Vienna, had this nagging question. He studied two wards in the hospital. One was staffed by all male doctors and medical students, and the others were staffed by female midwives. And he counted the number of deaths in each ward. As Semmelweis crunched the numbers he discovered that the women in the clinic staffed by the doctors and the medical students died at a rate five times greater than the women in the midwives unit, right? So, why? The big difference between the doctors ward and the midwives ward, was he came down, was because the doctors were doing autopsies and the midwives weren't. So, he ordered his medical staff to start cleaning their hands. What a concept, huh? And instruments, not just with soap, but with a chlorine solution. Before the experiment, the mortality rate for the new mothers was as high as 18%. After he implemented this hand hygiene between the morgue and the delivery room, the rate of mortality dropped to 1%. You would think everyone would be thrilled that his experiment solved the problem. But you know what? The doctors weren't thrilled. The doctors were upset because the hypothesis made them look like that they were giving child bed fever to the women. Well, duh, eventually, get this, the doctors gave up the hand washing and Semmelweis lost his job. It would take another 30 years or so before hand washing would become the norm in medical care. And Semmelweis ended up an outcast dying in a mental asylum.

I find this an amazing story because, first of all, now a days we take hand washing for granted. Do we not? The story stops and makes us think about all the great thinkers of the world down through the ages, the inventors, the innovators, the revolutionaries, the dreamers, the justice makers. How often they have been met with rejection, failure, and resistance in opposition. All these things that we nowadays take for granted that form the fabric of our modern life, from the telephone, the car, electricity, oil, movies, television, computers, even the fact that we here can gather and worship according to our conscience. All these concepts were first met with resistance and skepticism. It can't be done. It's inconceivable. Yet, here we are, benefiting



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from the dreams, the courage, the perseverance of those who have come before us.

Today, Jesus tells us a story about what it means to persevere and to commit, to not lose heart when the going gets tough. Jesus talks about a widow and an unjust judge, a judge who had no scruples, cared only for his own pocket. Widows, as we know, were the most vulnerable people in Jesus' day. They were often treated as property. They were left with no means of support unless they had a male adult child. If her husband has an estate, she would be at the mercy of the person who took care of the estate, often inviting abuse. Widows were the poorest of the poor, overlooked, taken advantage of, and silenced. So remarkably, Jesus tells a story that would have been fantastic for his day. Imagine here is this widow who claims a voice, who dares to take a stance. This widow has no male intermediary to state her case before the judge. She states her own case. And for many times, she is put off and put off and put off, she keeps pushing back. She refuses to be let down. She doesn't stop. She's relentless. She's like the energizer bunny, right? She keeps going. She won't be kicked to the curb. She fought and fought and fought for what she believed in until finally, she just wore out this unscrupulous judge. And he ruled in her favor, not because it was right or wrong, but he just wanted to get rid of her.

Jesus tells us this remarkable story to get us to stop and think. If this lonely, lonely widow could remain committed to her cause and win, despite all that it was stacked against her, how dedicated are we to matters that faith and justice here on earth? Are we persistent and committed as she is? Are we committed to justice and willing to fight for it like she was? Are we committed like Jesus was to awakening in people, the spiritual laws that God has placed in our very hearts? In an age where commitment didn't hold the value it once did. When it was easier now to give up. It is time that we reclaim the habits of devotion this widow shows, and to be willing to undergo hardship to hold fast because sharing God's love and justice is worth our time. It's worth our talents. It's worth giving it our all.



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Luke's widow who faced more obstacles than we can imagine is often the model of persistent prayer, that we are to be relentless in our prayer, trusting that God will answer us, maybe not in our timing, maybe not quite the way we expect God to respond. But let's take this parable a step further, if we will, and look at it from a different angle. What if we were to see God as the persistent widow in this story? What if humankind was the corrupt judge who cared not for God or neighbor? I don't know about you, but I look around our world today, and I think this fits and I feel convicted. It is God, the persistent widow, banging relentlessly on the doors of our hearts to care, to love one another, to fight for peace and justice on this earth, and to create a world where hunger and homelessness is a thing of the past, to build a society where the ill have access to treatments they need, where there is a space for the foreigner in the midst at our tables. It is God who is knocking persistently, and loudly, and unrelentlessly on the human heart, to give us a new vision of living, to plant the dreams, the ideas, and the innovations to create a better, healthier, more connected, and compassionate world. God places that divine vision among us, among, as he did with the Martin Luther Kings among us, the artist, the innovators among us, to keep knocking until we answer, until we listen and catch on. So, what if people laugh, mock us? So, what if people ridicule or argue with us? So, what if people take advantage? Because what matters is that we stand fast for something good, something true, something eternal like Jesus did.

So, God is knocking today. God keeps coming at us, and over and over, and God will not take no for an answer until our church, this congregation becomes the living vision of God. It is right there, written on our hearts, God's law of love. And isn't that worth fighting for? Isn't that worth staying the course? Isn't that worth our time, our effort, our sacrifice? So, the question is, will we, like God as the persistent widow, persevere? It makes the difference between being a stagnant church and one that thrives. It makes the difference between a stuck congregation or a vital congregation. It's the difference between a life led by the rules of playing it safe or a life driven by vision and purpose and meaning. So today, when God knocks, let us answer. Let us



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persevere in committing ourselves to an unknown future that lies before us for the causes of the kingdom, knowing that we have a God who delights in our dreams, whose law has been written on our hearts, and who is eager to make us become the answers to the problems that plague our world, and to make us the vision and model of a just society, a place where God will find justice, where God will find faith when He comes again in glory. Amen.