

## HOW TO BUILD A JUST WORLD: LESSONS FROM A WIDOW

So the gospel story of the widow and the judge, known as the, sometimes as the persistent widow is a little confusing at first but I think you're going to find within this gospel, is a real gem of a lesson that is so practical to our world today that it's unbelievable. It's really a great, great gospel story and basically Jesus is saying, there's this widow, she is so annoying and seeking justice from a judge, that the judge who has no spiritual outlook, no belief in anything, just says "Lady you are such a pain in the ... I'll do it, not because I'm a good person but just to get you off my back." And so Jesus says, if that's how persistence works in the world, imagine what persistence can happen with God.

Amen, the sermons done. This gospel lesson is about social justice. It's about how Justice happens in the world. And that's a hot topic right now. It's a hot topic for everybody but it's a really hot topic among the rising generation. We did a really exciting dinner here of thirty people, under thirty talking about what spirituality means to them. And it was fascinating because they said "We don't like religion, we don't think there's any real truth. My truth is as viable as your truth, is as viable as their truth. We all have our own truth. So whatever you believe, that's your truth." And then we talked about, but what's important, what are your values and what are key? And then they said "Oh you can't be anti-gay and you can't be anti-women, you can't be racist and you can't be against immigrants." So they started talking all these [00:01:57]. I said well those are sort of values. And they said "No, that's social justice; that's social justice, that's not the truth. It's just what's obvious to any good person that that's how you would be. So the value of social justice has really, excitingly, been present in the rising generation. It's been around for a long time. We've certainly heard the phrase. But what does it really mean? I can tell you what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean talking about a topic and thinking that you're changing the world. It doesn't mean liking a link on Facebook and saying I like that poem and therefore I'm on your side. It doesn't mean just passively thinking and saying in a dinner conversation, "This is my opinion." That's not how the world changes. That's not social justice. That's an opinion. We've confused opinion with world change and from our spiritual perspective, God asks of us, that while we're on this planet that we are God's hands, that we are active in this world to bring Justice. We should be doing it. Those of us that claim to be guided by God should be the most active on earth toward making it a better place. But that means activity.

I believe that the widow in the story gives us three really concrete lessons that we can apply to our life when we're trying to create justice. The first lesson is persistence, tenacity. I just came back from Boston where I was at something called Sustainatopia and it's all about investment and impact investing for social change. Someone raised their hand "What characteristic do you find the most important among the successful investments the people who really change the world and get a return on. What about them? And they said the first thing is their biography; it's never the model, it's always the person. Tenacity, they've got tenacity. They here of people who have proven in their life that they can stick with it. They are going to be persistent. If nothing else this widow is known as being persistent.

Seth Godin in one of his books called 'The Dip,' says that it's really tricky to know when to stop and when to keep going. He says ":Life is like when you're in a dip and you're trying to solve something, because we all think that things are going to go like this, the plan is going to go like this, and we know in life it goes like this and there's downfall and failure and mistakes." And in the book he points out how many people are in the dip and they stuck with it and came out to incredible change. Had they given up, the world would not have changed but he has a caveat just to make it complicated. He said "Sometimes we're in a culdesac or just driving around and around in a circle. We're not in a dip and figuring out when you're in one or the other is the key to a successful leader. Figuring out when you're doing the same thing and expecting something different or when you're really in a tough period but is there a plan how we're going to get out of this? So persistence is a key phrase.

Tomorrow we'll be talking with the denominational leadership about this church. And there are people here today who, it was their persistence and tenacity that allows me to be preaching in this pulpit, for this local congregation. And Jane, I think of you and your life, because I know you were ordained when I transferred my ordination. But for a woman at your age, at your time, growing up Pretty Prairie when no women were ordained, to decide to become ordained to shift your life, that had to take incredible persistence. In a way women understand better than men because of what they've been up against in changing things. So the persistence of sticking through is the number one lesson. Tenacity, you either have it or you don't. But if you're a quitter, you're not going to change the world because it's going to be tough. It's going to take a while.

What's the second? What's the second lesson from this? I think the second lesson, not much talked about, is that she is a nag. She does not care what the judge thinks of her. She is not

entering a popularity contest. She doesn't want to be liked. She wants justice. We also live in a culture where we're all polite people. We want to be liked and there comes a moment when you're fighting for justice where you must risk being misunderstood and being unpopular and possibly being disliked. And if you really changed the status quo, you'd probably be hated. That's what happens to people who change the world. So she is not Miss Congeniality. She is willing to risk what the judge might think of her, to accomplish the justice that she's trying to do. Moral courage is the key ingredient to most social change in the world and it almost always requires going against the status quo. That is a risk. She exemplifies it.

So what's the third element in changing the world? I've got the pulpit, you're in a church, I get to say it: God. In fact that's the whole purpose of the parable. The purpose of the parable is to say that this is how the world operates and she gets what she wants. Imagine when you tap into the power of God when you're doing good in the world. We live in an illusion that we do things and that we're not connected. I recently heard a speaker at a conference and he made a very good point. At this conference with investment bankers, very financial people he just said "You know we're all connected and there's all oneness." And the room kind of looked at each other like "Oh boy, I didn't know this was going to be an S-seminar, I thought it was going to be a talk on how we change the world. And he just gave this analogy I'd like to share with you. To summon the audience he said "So when you breathe, what do you breathe from?" A person said "Lungs, you need your Lungs." He said "Okay, so if we took your Lungs out and we put them up here, we'd be able to breathe?" "No, no, of course not, I need the body." "Oh, so to breathe you need the body and the lungs connected? Oh, okay so it's not just the Lungs it's this unity. Okay so if we took a body and Lungs we can breathe?" "No we need air." "Oh okay so we have air, the body, lungs, now we can breathe so we can do it ourselves." "No actually we need the environment which is protected by a very thin shell from the universe." And the point he was making was "We're all connected. This is all connected. We all need each other. I would take it a step further and say that's God. I would say that every time you take a breath it's but by the grace of God. Now this would be the most controversial thing that I could share in a speech about changing the world or in a strategy session. I'm more and more convinced that God has to play a role. Does that mean that people have to believe in a certain religious dogma or doctrine to really be change agents? Absolutely not, but I do believe that the spiritual power is the transformative power.

People know that I'm obsessed with this idea of Spiritual Entrepreneurship. And people always say "But, there are no examples, no-one's ever done it. And I say "Well who are your heroes? Who are your big change agents?" They say "Oh Martin Luther King and Ghandi and then Mother Teresa and Bon Hoffer and these great people who changed the..." Well you do know that they were all, you know before he was Doctor Martin Luther King, he was Reverend King. "Oh I never thought of that, you're right." So we've kind of taken that up and it was the spiritual nature i think and the support to be persistent, to be disliked, I think you actually need spiritual support in those moments and that is God. And I think things are changing.

Just this last week someone came to me and said "We're doing a big grant and it's going to be about what happens after this horrible election. Because if you think the election is going to end the anxiety and the pressure and the negative talk, I think we all agree that's not going to happen. Whatever happens there's going to be some people who are going to be very angry and in a way that we've almost never seen, and frighteningly angry. And so now the funders are saying "What would you do, you've been working on this hyper-partisanship and republicans, democrats, what would you do? What do you think the secret is and we have these ideas and these ideas and we have a lot of money," and I said "Well I'm going to be blunt, I think it's not going to happen without a spiritual aspect to it. It's going to be a transformation of consciousness. We've got to realize that we're one and we're connected you know. If that sounds flaky, I'm willing to be unpopular and unheard but I'm just saying that i am convinced that God underlines these things, if you want to say the evolution of humanity, the evolution of consciousness, i don't care what words you use, but to accomplish great change in the world, i do believe requires the humility of believing in God. And all of this in a gospel parable about a widow who took on a judge and she taught us in the parable how to be tenacious, how to stand up and be willing to be unpopular and finally, the lesson of Jesus, that if she can accomplish that, imagine what we can do with God's help.

Amen.