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“And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence describes Domestic Violence “as the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another. It includes physical violence, sexual violence, threats, and emotional and psychological abuse.”

In this country, one in four women and one in nine men experience some form of domestic violence.

Last Thursday, I attended the Domestic Violence Summit held at Mosaic Church over on Maple St. Throughout the years, I had encountered many women in the midst of obvious abuse situations. Repeated trips to the emergency room for injuries; repeated stories of falling or running into doors.

Attending this conference for me, just reinforced that it is never too late to learn. I cannot remember how many times, I encouraged women to leave the situations they were in with the hope of keeping themselves safe. I especially encouraged them to leave if children were involved. How many times had I asked, “Why do you keep going back?” The irritation in my voice was evident as the answer was often; “Because he loves me”. How many of us have asked a friend or colleague who is known to be in an abusive relationship, “Why don’t you just leave?” One survivor responded this way; “He warned me that if I left him, he would hunt me down. He was going to shoot me. He was going to paralyze me. He was going to

throw acid on my face.” It is true that the process of leaving an abuser is the most dangerous time for a victim of abuse.

Admittedly, we have come a long way over the years in our understanding of how the brain works in relation to abuse.

We now know a lot more about PTSD; about how the mind is flooded with hormones in the face of trauma. How our survival defenses respond much differently in relation to our left brain and our right brain function. In a setting of heightened stress, our left brain is the part that allows us to still function and perform the normal parts of daily life. But this can be in direct conflict with the Right brain that controls our survival defenses of flight, fight, freeze, submit, and attach. There has been a lot of recent work and research into how all of this works. The logic part of the brain simply does not work in a high stress situation. Most of these folks find that simply surviving is all that they can handle. The overflow of hormones by the brain in a response to danger affects not only a normal response to stress but affects short term memory. Why is all of this important? Memories of a traumatic event are often jumbled and not immediately available for recall.

Law Enforcement, teachers, and health care providers are required in most cases to have training in Domestic Violence. However, one of the most important groups with a direct effect on outcomes are not required, in most states, to have any training in this area. This includes Michigan. The group in question are the judges.

In August of 2008, Dorene Seidl went to court to have a Domestic Violence Order (DVO) entered after she had filed a series of protection orders documenting a history of abuse. The judge claimed the case was a “he said, she said” and ruled it was not domestic violence.

When Dorene Seidl went home a few days later accompanied by Mr. Seidl's brother to gather her belongings, Mr. Seidl emptied a loaded gun into her and murdered her. Without requiring judges to have the proper training, we may see more occurrences of what happened in court when a county judge put a victim behind bars for changing her story after her abuser used coercive behaviors from behind bars to intimidate her to change her testimony. If a school teacher needs to have this training, how much more a judge who can decide the fate of those involved.

Most judges really do the best that they can to find justice in the situations that they find themselves. I just think that they can do better.

This morning, we hear about a different justice situation involving a poor persistent widow and a judge who has no fear of God and no respect for anyone. This was a judge who had no interest in further training in justice. That it is a widow who implores the judge for justice places an additional burden on the judge to do the right thing. Widows, in the time of Jesus, were very much marginalized.

Due to cultural expectations concerning female virginity and fewer opportunities for their fiscal self-provision, woman at that time tended to marry quite early — even in their teens, as we know in the case of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Husbands were the figurehead of the ancient Near Eastern power structure, and due to this responsibility, they tended to marry later, in their 20s and 30s. These age gaps meant that eventually many wives ended up as widows, leaving them without power or provision.

Mosaic Law prescribes that the husband's immediate family and the community of faith were primarily responsible for these women. In fact, Exodus CH 22 22-24 reads: "22 "Do

not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless. 23 If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. 24 My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless.” And in the Book of Deuteronomy; “God has a special affection for widows, orphans and aliens.” (Deuteronomy 10:18-19).

As this notion would not be lost on Jesus’ audience, this would have been a glaring detail in this story that would jump off the page: Why was there nobody but this judge who could help this woman with her opponent? Either she had no other family or community, or they were ignoring her. The persistent widow had absolutely no cultural advantage, no strings to pull, no one to stand up for her. Nothing. So, there was every cultural expectation of the judge being sympathetic to her needs. But not for this particular judge.

Many people have looked at this reading, as it is related to prayer and petitions, and thought it meant that repeated requests to God for whatever was needed would eventually be granted as long as you were persistent. God, I need a new car. God please give me a new car. God, my car is getting high in miles, I really could use a new one...and so on. Obviously, God would eventually get tired of hearing this and get us a new car, or so we thought. Bugging God to death about what we want is not the point of this parable. The parable is all about justice.

Jesus wants to engender two things in his listeners: belief in God’s justice and the value of persistence in securing it. This parable is one of two in Luke’s Gospel, where Luke explains the parable in the introduction. “Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray

always and not to lose heart.” Many scholars feel that Luke also adds the final verse after the parable; “And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

This can make sense if we realize that Luke is writing to those, undergoing great persecution, who have been waiting for years for the promised 2nd coming of Jesus which they felt was imminent. They were starting to be discouraged and defeated. Was Jesus really coming back? Luke’s concern was a falling away in faith. Putting this parable in these terms was not totally unreasonable. Jesus was saying that if the disenfranchised widow got some semblance of justice from the unjust judge, it was for no other reason than her persistence. How much more would God, the exact opposite of the corrupt judge, be willing to grant a request for justice? This persistence in prayer to God is much more than we are used to.

There is a story about a small village church which had a sanctuary that needed a new roof. After every Sunday service, the congregation would kneel to pray for the new roof. And at the end of the prayer, there would be another collection.

One long-time parishioner, renowned for being very tight fisted, used to come and sit at the back of the church - so he could make a quick escape when the collection plate came around.

One Sunday just as he was going to into the service, he was held up by the vicar - and so came in a little late. Unfortunately, there was only room at the front. So, he went to the front and sat down there.

During the service, a piece of roof fell and hit him on the head. Feeling spoken to, he stood up and said: "Lord, I'll give \$1000.00". A voice in the back rang out: "Hit him again Lord".

Is that how we think God answers prayer? Not likely.

Many of us respond quickly when asked to pray for someone who has requested prayers. We petition God in prayer every Sunday for those on our prayer list and during the prayers of the people. And we pray very sincerely and with love. But how often do we continue those prayers throughout the week? How often do we persist in prayer? Whenever one's heart and soul are affected by a friend's story, by a sermon's message, by what is read, by what is experienced at work, by what the television reports about crises on the other side of the globe, we should pray.

Prayer should be like a reflex in the body. When we step on something sharp, we instantly put all our weight on the other foot. It is natural and immediate. Prayer can eventually become like this ... with practice. With being persistent. That is what Jesus is talking about.

With practice, we pray quick sentence prayers as a response to God, based on anything our eyes and ears perceive. Prayer becomes a part of who we are. And when that happens, our relationship with God changes. What we pray for becomes more in line with what God wants, not just what we want. Christians stand in tension with all of the injustice in the world. It can feel overwhelming at times with injustice surrounding us at every turn. Much like the early Christians, we can feel discouraged wondering if God will answer our prayers. A sin-tainted world will always provide injustices, but we believe that God uses his truth and his followers to bring redemption to these places. We have the assurance that if we

persevere in prayer and continue to seek out God, justice will win out; God's justice. That is the only kind that matters. AMEN