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Proper 24C
Peace, Seattle
October 17, 2010 epk
Luke 18:1-8

FINDING OUR VOICE

They called themselves MADRES DE PLAZA DE MAYO – MOTHERS OF THE PLAZA DE MAYO. In the wake of Argentina's "Dirty War" from 1976 to 1983, when the military government kidnapped and killed thousands of so called "subversives," a group of mothers began to meet each Thursday in the large Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, the site of Argentina's government.

State censorship prevented any discussion of the "disappeared." Those who spoke out put their own lives in danger. But that didn't deter these mothers. There on the Plaza de Mayo they walked in non-violent demonstrations, and as they walked they chanted:

WE WANT OUR CHILDREN; WE WANT [YOU] TO TELL US WHERE THEY ARE.
NO MATTER WHAT OUR CHILDREN THINK THEY SHOULD NOT BE TORTURED.
THEY SHOULD HAVE CHARGES BROUGHT, AND WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO VISIT THEM.

The mothers' simple request was the first time any of the public had spoken out against the brutality of the regime. One of the women, <u>María del Rosario de Cerruti</u>, had this to say:

"One of the things that I simply will not do now is shut up. The women of my generation in Latin America have been taught that the man is always in charge and the woman is silent even in the face of injustice...Now I know that we have to speak out about the injustices publicly. If not, we are accomplices. I am going to denounce them publicly without fear. This is what I learned."[1]

María and the widow of today's parable are, it seems, cut from the same clothe. Vulnerable in every way—socially, financially, physically—the widow has little ground to stand on. Approaching the corrupt judge with <u>no one</u> by her side and <u>nothing</u> in her purse to grease his palm, she pounds on his door over and over again demanding to be heard.

Contrast her with the judge—a male in a male-driven world; a man who wields power even though that power is devoid of an ethical foundation—**and you get the picture:**

She doesn't have a <u>snowball's chance</u> in "heck" of getting him to pay attention to her case, <u>much less</u> deciding in her favor!

But, as the parables of Jesus attest, things go topsy-turvy in the world of God's reign.

The rotten judge, <u>worn down by the woman's persistence</u>, finally sticks his head out the window and shouts, ENOUGH ALREADY! I'LL GET YOU WHATEVER YOU WANT IF YOU JUST SHUT UP! And justice, at last, is done.

Jesus must have gotten a lot of laughs with that parable…and lots of sighs, too.

His listeners know this woman—she always gets a raw deal because she has nothing—no husband, no inheritance, no social standing. They know this judge too—the one who's only out for himself. They throw their heads back at the idea of <u>one of their own</u>, this powerless woman, annoying the sleazy politician until finally, he does something good in spite of himself.[2] [Feast, 188 KBL]

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[1] Information on the Madres de Plaza de Mayo is taken from the *Women in World History* website: http://www.womeninworldhistory.com/contemporary-07.html
[2] Kimberly Bracken Long, *Feasting on the Word, Year C Volume 4.* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, 188.

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Is this what prayer is like? At times it can certainly feel that way.

- Pounding at heaven's door but to no avail.
- Praying for the disease to relent,
- Praying for the job opening to come,
- Praying that somehow, some way, the hurt will heal, peace will prevail, the disaster will be averted, the world will be made whole.

What hope does Jesus offer us in this parable? He insists that God is nothing like the unjust judge; that God will grant even speedier relief than the widow got. But is that promise enough for us? When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?

> "If the Son of Man is to find faith on earth," writes Kimberly Bracken Long, "we must understand that our prayers do not constitute so many unanswered pleas; rather, they are our participation in the coming reign of God. By praying continually, and not giving up hope, we live in the surety that God has not abandoned this world. Living in hope, we work, in whatever ways we can, for the justice and peace that is coming."[3] [190]

Well, today we have the opportunity to practice such a hope; to join the widow, to join the madres, and to make our own voices heard as participants in Bread for the World's Offering of Letters campaign.

We are exercising our faith and our citizenship by writing letters to our congressional delegation in support of the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit.

Is this mixing politics and religion? You could say that, I suppose. But I'd rather frame what we're doing today in terms of what we hear unfolding in our weekly lessons of Scripture.

Throughout the fall we have heard in the voices of the prophets God's advocacy on behalf of the poor and vulnerable and God's dismay over those who neglect them or bring them harm. In the parables of Jesus we've heard God's call to care for those who are different from us, to open our eyes to those who would otherwise remain invisible, to show compassion even when that means venturing outside our comfort zones, and today, to be persistent pray-ers.

History teaches us that sometimes it takes extraordinary—even socially unacceptable behavior to effect change. And that sometimes it takes one straw, or one letter, piled upon another to break the impasse, to get on the agenda, to turn the tide. The widow's persistence in today's parable confirms as much.

God, the Bible insists, gives special attention to those who are most vulnerable.
God knows how easy it is for the powers that be to ignore those who have no power except the rightness of their cause; therefore, when it comes to looking out for the interests of the last and the least, God commands us not to shrink from persistent appeal.[4]

Instead, like the widow, like the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo, God calls us to stand up, to go public, to persist with our advocacy, even to the point of embarrassing the powers that be in order to induce change.

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[3] Ibid, p. 190.
[4] Point made by David Lose at: http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect_date=10/17/2010

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In this election season, with political parties flooding the airwaves with attack ads that appeal to our basest fears and instincts, it's easy to become cynical about the whole broken down process.

Issues of justice and care for the most vulnerable in our society get buried at the bottom of the heap while self-interest initiatives rise to the top.

Does the system as currently practiced, have the capacity to move beyond partisanship to establish laws protecting the most vulnerable ones among us? We wonder.

But even while we wonder, we pray, we write, and we come to the Table once more, so that our faith and hope in God's promised reign can be fed.

Amen.