

Do you remember the strike of the engine drivers in Germany, about a year and a half ago? Altogether, the strike lasted nearly nine months. Many passengers became angry, even though they understood why the engine drivers were on strike. Maybe you were one of them.

A group of poorly paid people strike for the right to get fair pay – and the opponents on the other side of the table do not move.

No one gives in, as always when there is a strike. And as always, people are curious about how long it will take to find a solution.

Who will blink first?

Who will break the deadlock and make sure no one loses face?

I wonder whether Jesus today would take the steadfastness of the engine drivers as an example? You don't believe that? Then listen again:

1 Then Jesus told them a parable (about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.) 2 He said, 'In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. 3 In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, "Grant me justice against my opponent." 4 For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, "Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, 5 I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming." 6 And the Lord said, 'Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them?

8 I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?' (Luke 18: 1-8)

The story tells us about two people, who would normally never have any dealings with each other: A judge and a widow.

To be honest: I would not want to deal with a judge like the one Jesus tells about, nor would I like to depend on him.

According to Jesus, the summary of the Ten Commandments is: "You shall love the Lord your God and you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

The judge in this story loves neither God nor his neighbor. There is only one point he accords with: he loves himself. Only himself.

It is very hard to share life with someone who doesn't love God, who doesn't respect others, who is not interested in anybody else, who is not moved by their concerns, who doesn't care for others nor comfort them.

According to the Old Testament, where the justice of God has to be debated in the law court, a person like this cannot become a judge.

The only authority which counts for the judge, is his own ego. You can't build a sustainable Community with people like him. As soon as they come to power, they become dangerous.

The point is not that the judge does not have a will of his own. Of course, he has a will of his own. And this will is: He does not want to help! His conscience and his code of ethics as a judge are at the zero point of a scale.

In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him...

Actually there is no need to continue with the story. Everyone already knows how the story will end. This dependent and fragile woman meets someone who does not know anything except his EGO.

Some of you might know how it feels to lose a husband or wife. In New Testament times, pain and grief were not the only burden of such a loss.

The wife was the property of the husband. As soon as he died, she became the property of his brother, if there was one.

A widow didn't have any rights. As soon as the husband had died, she was something like a leftover, handed over to the egoism and the power of the mighty.

Judge and Widow. An absolutely unequal couple. Power, arrogance, disregard of the basic commandments on the one side – lack of rights and misery on the other side.

If we just had to accept that with a shrug of the shoulders or resignation, the story would not be part of the bible. Nevertheless, where human stories end so often in hopelessness, dejection or tiredness, the stories of the bible are more likely to start from there.

Something absolutely incredible happens. The widow acts. She starts taking matters into her own hands. She walks to the judge and puts in her claim: Grant me justice! The headline in the German bibles should not be "The begging widow". She is not begging humbly. She is demanding! She is hard-pressed by injustice, and now she acts. Maybe she had been looking after her husband and children all her life. Now she looks after herself.

Maybe her neighbors had warned her, had told her the usual story: "Who are you? How can you dare to insist on your rights? You are a Nobody! Behave like always, avoid attracting attention! The top brass always do what they want. You are not going to change them."

How sweet is the temptation of resignation and surrender!

How easy is it to make yourself weak and small.

But not in this story: Grant me justice!

Do you remember the psalm reading?

The widow brings along the whole authority and the theological tradition of her Jewish Bible, the Old Testament. She is **one** voice in the many-voiced, thousand years old choir, the scream, the complaint, the prayer of the poor and widows, which comes before God: Grant me justice!

This choir never fell silent. Throughout all centuries the choir grew bigger and louder. The victims of all times queued, raised their voices, cried, complained and prayed to God:

Grant us justice!

Of course the widow is rejected and sent home after she arrives at the judge's office. It will take some time. But she does not give in. They can't get rid of her.

Of course, she is afraid and has to fight back her tears. But she knows: I have the right to live, to breathe, to laugh. There has to be justice for me as well. And I will fight for the right to live, to laugh, to breathe.

But it takes time. Her nerves are jangled. The despair grows.

Maybe the judge is using delaying tactics, who knows? If you wait long enough, the problem will sort itself out. But that does not work in this story.

The widow discovers a strength in herself which had been buried for a long time. She knows: It's me who has to do it, only me!

There is no one who can take this burden. I will learn to act for myself.

Although it is tough, I am able to do it.

She badgers the judge, she comes again and again, she begs and argues, she is angry and furious, she demands and cries. She throws her own EGO into the scale against the EGO of the judge. That's all she has, her own life – and God at her side, who has always had an open heart for widows. She fights, she inconveniences, she gets on the judge's nerves – until he is no longer able to abdicate his responsibility and is defeated by this power.

She is granted the justice she needs to live an upright life.

The judge gives in – although he doesn't give in for an honorable reason. It's not because he accepts that he has to act according to God's justice, nor is it because he realized the need of the widow. He wasn't sorry for her misery at all.

No. It was because she got on his nerves. Because she tired him out. He doesn't want to burden his EGO any longer, he is tired of the discussion. In the end, he is afraid to lose his reputation – that is what he lays open when he speaks.

And Jesus says: Listen to what he says! Look at him, the judge of injustice. In the end he grants her justice!

It is a wonderful story. A story of the power of God, which is strong in the weak! It is a wonderful story in which the salvation of God shines. A story that tells us that reconciliation and justice don't have to be denied. A story that tells us that God shares our lives, that he helps us carry the burden of our lives, that he shares our happiness and our suffering. It is a wonderful story that lifts us up and tells us that we have the right to life and justice. It is a wonderful story that tells us that we have the right to say, "I want to" in order to create a community.

It is an encouraging story of Jesus by which he strengthens all of us, who have not been listened to when seeking justice. It is a parable by which Jesus strengthens all of us who don't have enough courage and power to persevere. It is a story for those of us who need someone to argue for them. Jesus had been listening to the Proverbs of King Solomon who wrote in the Old Testament: "*Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.*" (Proverbs 31, 8+9)

This parable of Jesus has another purpose.

Some of you might have noticed that I left out part of the bible text when I read it again at the beginning of the sermon. Originally, the story begins like this:

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.

Then comes the story of the judge and the widow.

That is how we should pray! Like the widow who does not give up, who does not let herself be discouraged, who insists on her rights, who appears again and again in front of the judge's door. That is how we should pray! Patient like her, persistent like her, full of hope like her.

The widow is quite tough. It seems to be self-evident that she insists on her rights. That is how our confidence should be, that God will never be far from us, that his help and his coming kingdom are not a fairytale, but can be expected and trusted in.

If the faith of the disciples, the faith of the first congregations, if our faith could be that undisputed – it would not have been necessary to tell this story in the New Testament.

The widow mirrors the first small churches. They had been waiting for the Second Coming of Jesus. But the waiting continued. And continued. And it still continues today.

Just as the widow had to wait a long time for justice, so it was for the first churches; so it is for us:

We are still waiting for God`s justice;

Pain, screaming, and tears are still part of this world;

Famine and violence aren`t foreign to us yet;

people still know what “asylum” can mean;

and, and, and...

The kingdom of God is not yet fully present among us so that there is no more death. We are still waiting – and sometimes faith and hope get tired and love is a struggle. Our neighbor, who needs us, becomes a burden. That is how we have been from the beginning, like Simon Peter and the other disciples.

That is why we need the widow and her faith.

When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?

Will he find faith that does not get tired, that stays sure and keeps believing that in the very end, however long it takes, the justice of God will be granted? Don`t weaken – that`s what Jesus tells us by this parable. Look at the widow. Nothing had been provided for her. Look at her faith and how she was granted justice in the end. And listen to what the unjust judge says.

If the judge grants justice for the widow for egoistic reasons, because he is not keen on helping her, because she is annoying, because he is afraid of losing his reputation – if a judge like him grants her justice – will God delay in helping us? God who is interested in us, who shares our lives, who is touched by our pain – how could he forget, how could he not create a new world, as he has promised?

Until the new world appears: Persevere in prayer.

Praying like that does not only mean speaking to God with folded hands. The background is, as the apostle Paul wrote, that we present our whole life as a spiritual worship.

Let me translate it the following way:

Adopt an attitude. Adopt the attitude of prayer in all circumstances, in all your doing, planning and discussing.

Don`t forget that life is a gift.

Keep your willingness to vouch for others, to speak up for those who cannot speak, to live as if life was an intercession.

Remain attentive, listening to God`s sometimes very silent words and to the sometimes very silent weeping of people.

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.

He tells us this parable about our need to live our lives in the attitude of prayer, about the need that our wishes have to be bigger than what the adverts offer.

Jesus encourages us not to be satisfied with less than what is promised by the kingdom of God.

Jesus tells us a parable about how we can remain in conversation with God about our whole life, about our hopes and wishes, our plans and projects, our decisions to act or not to act.

Will not God grant justice to **us**, his chosen ones, who are his disciples, hoping for his new world to come?

Amen