

# THE PERSISTENT WIDOW

## LUKE 18:1-10

Justice & Righteousness Series

### OPENING PRAYER

Loving God, Open our hearts to receive your wisdom. Amen

### EXEGESIS AND REFLECTION

Caught in a web of patriarchy, and living under an oppressive power of a 1st century agrarian society that supported the elite and rendered the marginalised invisible, a widow comes to an unjust judge and pleads for help. Under the Torah (law) of first century Palestine, a widow was given special protection (Exodus 22.21-24), but also considered as being in a special position as she was not strictly bound to any male head of household, such as husband or father.

This widow is persistent in her demand for justice, resisting the oppressive system, and incapacitating it so it would not overcome and have its way with her. She is courageous and focussed, not taking “no” for an answer but kept on pressing for her expected outcome of justice from a judge, who according to the story, feared neither God nor people (v.2). She was not fearful nor did she waver in the presence of such a dreaded character.

What this woman did is significant. She challenges the legal and religious systems, which are rooted in the ideology of patriarchy and its political and social construct, and their destructive impact on women and all persons who are considered as outcasts. She may be seen as stepping out of line, beyond her place, but she is relentless in her pursuit of justice with much courage and hope.

What would a judge do when a person steps out of line? Think of the Canaanite woman who also stepped out of line, leaving all protocol unobserved, and who argued with Jesus, keeping a steady her focus on her goal, that is, the healing for her daughter (Matt 15: 21-28). She did not falter but met Jesus with respect and challenged him to move beyond his current thinking.

When someone steps out of line, they disrupt the order, denying it in principle. This becomes a threat to the order and system. The persistent widow and the Canaanite woman disrupted the order, denying its might and principles. These two women are determined women who are firm and hold their arguments, and do not cave into being dismissed, disregarded and disrespected. They are women of faith who are firmly grounded in their belief in the God of life who overcomes death dealing situations.

The result is that they achieved their goals of justice and healing. They refused to be silent in their oppression. These stories challenge us to examine critically our situation and to contest

gender injustices, to speak out and name issues affecting those who are cast aside, to undermine and dismantle centres of power as we probe ecclesial, social and political systems of oppression. We are called to persist as agents of God's transformative mission, to bring about God's reign of justice, peace and love to all people.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who are the persons who are crying out for justice in your community? Who does the persistent widow represent in your community?
2. What types of gender injustices need to be addressed in your community/church/ nation? What wrongdoings may your church/community be oblivious to or complicit in?
3. Discuss the ways in which this woman crossed barriers? What was her motivation/inspiration? What was her strategy?

## CLOSING PRAYER

God of justice, grant us a vision of your world where peace with justice reigns;  
where the all genders live with dignity and respect;  
Where the vulnerable are protected, and no one goes hungry or feels unloved;  
where the world's wealth is shared and everyone's need is met;  
and where love and life abounds.

Grant us hope, courage and energy to participate in building it,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

*Written by Patricia Sheerathan-Bisnauth, the first woman to be ordained to the ministry in the Guyana Presbyterian Church in 1984. She served as parish minister in Guyana as well as gender and development specialist with local, regional and international NGOs.. From 2000 to 2011 she served as the Senior Program Executive for Justice and Partnership with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and World Communion of Reformed Churches.*