

Proper 24 Year C

“Jesus told his disciples a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.”

This past Tuesday evening *The Quest for Social Justice* and the *League of Women Voters* presented the documentary *Open Secret*, a thirty minute dramatization of the crafting of the 1901 Alabama constitutional convention. The documentary features actors reciting verbatim the transcript of this convention meeting....so this isn't a so-called revisionist's take on the birth of this ill begotten document, how it must have been...these are the actual words spoken by the architects of our common life in this state.

The head of the Quest, sister Judith Smits, had only called me a few weeks before to see if we would loan them Stirling Hall for this presentation... so we didn't have much time to publicize the event I'm sorry to say...I actually hadn't planned on going until I saw my name in the program slated to give the welcome and opening prayer...better go I thought...the program was this: first a meal; then welcome; we heard from some folks involved in the efforts to revise the state constitution; watched the documentary and then had conversations around our tables...At each place at the table were slips of paper...one white alternating with one tinted...Sister Judith explained that the white folks were to sit next to a person of color in order to balance the conversation....It was a diverse group.

We watched the documentary...and it was hard to watch...we heard educated, Christian men say things like, the white man is superior to the black man...that black people hadn't the intelligence to govern...that if they were to gain power they would wreak havoc with the god-given social order; that segregation was the way God meant for us to live...and women...they were to stay out of the affairs of men...and then perhaps the most appalling thing was that a former governor at this meeting said...that they couldn't make this happen by force...that it must be accomplished by law...so the Constitution was ratified by a state-wide vote....of course the vote was stolen...in Monroe county for example there were more pro votes than registered voters.

The room was deathly quiet during the film...except for the occasional painful groan at what we were seeing....and then it was time for conversation....there was shock...one African American woman said she had moved to Alabama from Boston with her husband and children, and had no idea of our constitutional roots...she wondered out loud if she had made the right decision...she worried for her children....there was anger....there

were tears.... We had the conversation...we also acknowledged that most of the gender biased and racist language of the Alabama constitution has now been trumped by federal law, thank God...the civil rights act, the voting rights act, women's suffrage, but still... the knowledge of such a document still on the books was hard to bear....we parted tenderly having made new friends...and then went our separate ways back into the night... most of us, I imagine, wondering what we could do....what we could do to change things....change for a better Alabama, we now one of only two states in the country who tax groceries....our entire system of taxation regressive.... segregation slowly but surely making its way back into our school systems.... our anachronistic constitution a symbol of our dysfunction...an icon of our roots that still has power over us....It must change before we can change.

I learned two things at this presentation....First, that the status quo is able to powerfully resist change...It has a dark inertia all its own...and second, that evil doesn't just happen by accident or blind neglect.... conscious decisions have to be made for it....just as conscious decisions must be made for the good.

Luke tells us in our Gospel reading for today that Jesus is telling a parable about the life of faith...specifically that we are to pray always and keep hope alive....now this is not a teaching on personal piety...this is about prayer as enlightened corporate action...prayer as a predisposition of paying attention to our world and then working at setting things right.... Prayer and Faith for Luke are the same thing....faith and prayer not something we possess or own...but faith a process.....Christ the model...The life we are to live is to act for the good in our world paying artful attention all the while....faith and prayer attuned to the process of creation...creation itself not a thing, but a process.

And of course, the symbol of the life of faith for Jesus is the widow....she the ubiquitous figure throughout Israel's biblical history...a phantom-like figure who appears and reappears to prophets and Kings and sages alike and reminds them of why we all exist in the first place....we are to attend to the vulnerable among us....Imagine, God's very passion articulated by a poor widow, the abused and shamed of her world...she the one to speak the words of God...that all things must be made whole.....a reprise of Mary's song...the mantra from the beginning of time in every world religion...the mantra: **take care of your own**...bring justice and fairness where there is oppression and injustice.....why do we forget?

I would like to suggest in our parable today that the so-called unrighteous judge is the status quo....the entrenched institutionalized way

we've always done it....perhaps in this parable our judge's delay is that he is waiting for a bribe...maybe he delays because of a conflict of interest... we're not told...but he's kind of like the Alabama legislature...denying justice to the most vulnerable among us...and Luke is harsh....the status quo he says does not fear God nor does it have any respect for people....and the only way to change it is to persist in the faith....bang at the door of injustice....wear injustice down...and for God sake don't lose heart.... persist and persist....and together persist in bearing the faith...persist for the world's sake.

This is a recurring theme in Luke...that faith is practice, and we discover belief through acting out the faith....He is demythologizing the theology of the Pharisees, and the theology of the modern world... the modern day Pharisees...Just believe properly, believe the dogma, just believe and all will be well...but that is an insidious means of abdicating our God-given responsibility; status quo religion, passive, irrelevant....Our responsibility as people of faith is to bang at the door of injustice to make sure that the widow is O.K.... simple as that.

There used to be a billboard around town that said, "Got Jesus." You know like the milk ads? How absurd...We are to be Jesus...We are to practice Jesus, else the world implodes at the behest and under the weight of the status quo....the status quo that fears transformation above all things... fears and resists transformation of our community, our state, our world...As people of faith our vocation is to change things for the widow, the least of our world. We are to act "as if" justice might find a way. That is the life of faith...acting as if.

Luke is making it real simple...simple, but of course in God's alchemy, profound...Luke is reminding us that it is not right belief that we're after...believing rightly... We'll never get it "right"....for one reason alone, belief changes as the world changes, belief a process of imaginative discernment, evolving with new knowledge and new revelation....but faith... faith persists...Our practice of the good will bring transformation to a world resisting such change at all costs...we see the status quo at work everywhere...planting the seeds of fear and ignorance....But that's not who we are dear sisters and brothers of an alive and doing faith....we are the ones who bang on the door of injustice until we wear it out....Bang on the door dear people of God... bang on the door.... And don't lose heart...persist, for God's sake.... Persist against the resistance...Persist... that love will at last find a way....and not a moment too soon.