

## Mission Reflection

*for the Season of Pentecost*

Seafarers International House



### Scripture

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my opponent.’ 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, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.’” And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”<sup>1</sup>

### Message

A woman in biblical times ranked little higher than a household chattel of a father or a husband, and if she became a widow, she wasn’t just vulnerable; she was invisible, devoid of any value in the community. But this widow persisted in her entreaties to a judge, not without some considerable risk to life and limb. The Gospel doesn’t indicate what the injustice was: it may have had global implications or it may just have been a personal affront. We don’t know. What is clear, however, is that it moved the judge, who neither feared God nor respected people. It is an extraordinary encounter between the powerful and the powerless. Justice prevailed.

Today, how do the powerless encounter the powerful to correct injustice? What is the role of the church? It isn’t as if we lack for issues of injustice: black lives matter, guns on the street, immigration reform and income inequality, to name just a few.

Alexa Salvatierra, an ELCA pastor and author in California, framed one issue of social injustice – immigration reform – this way: “Churches are taking care of the children of deported mothers but not investing their time and energy in changing the broken immigration system that results in unjust deportations and abandoned children.”<sup>2</sup> Churches tend to lack any ongoing commitment to social justice, in part because secular protests often lead to self-righteous rage, conflict rather than

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collaboration and a focus on self-interest, all of which seem “unchurchlike”. But sometimes, Salvatierra says, it’s necessary to create a critical mass of pressure so that the “pain of not doing justice” becomes greater than the “pain of doing justice“. For Lutherans, who are accustomed to sitting in the back pews, asking us to take the front lines is a little unsettling.

But we need to have the enduring faith of the widow in Luke’s Gospel. Because when the Son of Man comes, will he find in us that faith on earth?” Will we have offered prayers and cried out against injustice that our Lord will have seen for years? Will we have been faithful?

### *Prayer*

Lord, so often we lack the courage to speak out publicly against social injustice. Sometimes we ourselves don’t perceive the injustice, and other times when we do, we don’t want to offend anybody whose opinion may differ from ours. We think our silence can protect us from controversy. You, Lord, can see into our hearts, and our silence does not hide us from you. We ask that the Holy Spirit strengthen our faith and resolve to love kindness and to do justice. Amen.

1. Luke 18:1-8

2. Alexia Salvatierra, “Loving Mercy – Doing Justice”, JOURNAL OF LUTHERAN ETHICS, ELCA, Vol. 15, Issue 10, November/December 2015

**Postscript:** Prayer and advocacy are components of Seafarers International House’s mission to seafarers and immigrants. Because the American public rarely encounters a seafarer or an asylum seeker, the injustices they face – denial of shore leave for seafarers and immediate detention of arriving asylum seekers – are largely unknown to those of us ashore. These restrictions are imposed in the name of homeland security under the mantra, “when in doubt, lock them out”. Seafarers and asylum seekers are largely powerless to confront the powerful with their cries for justice. Each of us, however, can call out the unjust denial of shore leave and the unjust detention of asylum seekers, by writing to our senators ([www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)) and representatives ([www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov)). It only takes a few minutes, and because you vote, you are not powerless. For more information, log onto Seafarers International House’s website ([www.sihnyc.org](http://www.sihnyc.org)).

Seafarers International House serves seafarers and immigrants with pastoral care, hospitality, social assistance, advocacy and prayer in the ports in Baltimore, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and Philadelphia, and in an 84-room Guesthouse in Manhattan. The Guesthouse accommodates more than seafarers and immigrants. It’s available for church gatherings, civic groups and individuals in need of safe, affordable lodging. Our Guesthouse helps them accomplish their mission goals, and their patronage helps us accomplish ours. “Sleep Well By Doing Good.”

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