

## **“Against All Odds”**

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Luke 18:1-8

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of Christ in Hartford, UCC

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*“...when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on this earth?” (vs. 8)*

*Let us pray:*

This past summer, we were made aware of the heroic actions of Antoinette Tuff, the woman who talked down a shooter at the Ronald E. McNair Discovery Learning Center outside Atlanta.

We were all in great admiration of this woman, thinking about what our own reactions may have been if we were confronted with a similar situation.

She did not pretend that she did not downplay the urgency of the situation. In fact, in one of her statements, she said, “I’ve never been so scared in all the days of my life.”

But she also shares, in one her interviews, that her pastor taught her how to pray “inside.” And, as she was handling this situation, she was praying on the inside.

The Gospel lesson this morning was found in the book of Luke. It is important to note that, by the time the book of Luke is written almost a generation after Jesus’ death and resurrection, people were starting to lose heart.

They were getting tired of waiting for Jesus’ return and finally bring all things to fulfillment. They were growing anxious and weary.

As usual, Jesus brings to the center a figure from the margins of society to teach.

A persistent widow comes in front of an unrelenting judge, asking for justice to be done.

He refuses, but she persists to the point that she moves him to do justice.

The word “widow” in Hebrew – “*almanah*” means “silent one.” But here we see a widow who is anything but silent.

She has found her voice and is using it to advocate for herself.

Barbara Brown Taylor says, “She is willing to say what she wanted—out loud, day and night, over and over—whether she got it or not, because saying it is how she remembered who she was. It was how she remembered the shape of her heart.” (“Bothering God” in *Home by Another Way*).

So, what kept the widow insisting? What gave her the courage to find her voice?

What gave Antoinette Tuff the courage to humanize her plea to the potential shooter? What led her to dig into her heart to touch this troubled young man’s mind?

I submit that that faith was at the center. So, I wonder, how many of us are deeply committed and engaged with our faith?

We all have a different concept of faith. We understand it and have experienced it differently.

The bible tells us that “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1)

Marcus Borg in his Book, *The Heart of Christianity*, speaks of **faith as relationship**—giving your heart and your *radical trust* to God.

He argues that “you can believe all of the right things and still be in bondage. You can believe all the right things and still be miserable. You can believe all the right

things and still be unchanged. Believing a set of claims to be true has very little power.”

But at the heart of faith, there is relationship. Borg references the words of Soren Kierkegaard, the great Danish philosopher, who says that “faith as trust is like floating in seventy thousand fathoms of water. If you struggle, if you tense up and thrash about, you will eventually sink. But if you relax and trust, you will float.”

“Faith is trusting in the buoyancy of God. Faith is trusting in the sea of being, in which we live and move, and have our being.” (Borg)

So, we have a story that speaks to us about prayer, and justice, and faith. How do we move forward?

We are all in different places. Perhaps you may be in the place where you have a solid relationship with God.

Or, perhaps you can relate to the nun in the movie *The Painted Veil*. The nun overseeing the hospital in a Chinese village speaks of her relationship with God and says, “I fell in love when I was 17, with God,” she says, “Over the years my feelings have changed. He has disappointed me. Over the years, we have settled into a relationship of peaceful indifference.”

So, regardless of where we are, how do we move forward?

I respectfully submit that we find our voice in supplication and prayer. We find our voice to speak for justice. We rediscover our relationship with God in faith.

And when we are faced with the most difficult situations in our lives, I hope that we have such a radical trust in God, that even if we cannot utter the words, we could at least, “pray on the inside.” Amen.