

Persistence, Baptisms, and Ducks
Sermon preached at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
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It's good to be back after being away for three weeks. We had an amazing trip to Scotland, and will be happy to bore you with pictures and stories, just ask! But more on that later. First, we have a pesky widow to contend with.

Let's take a second to get our bearings. At this point in Luke's Gospel, Jesus is nearing the end of his journey to Jerusalem. Along the way, he continues to teach his disciples about the coming of God's kingdom. While Jesus' birth signaled the dawning of a new day - God's kingdom breaking into the world, it's not done becoming. It won't be complete until Jesus returns.

Which raises an obvious question - what do we do in the meantime? The Realm of God may be an era of justice, love, peace, and joy - but that's not our reality. We live in a time of injustice, hate, conflict, and sorrow. What does faith look like in the here and now?¹

The disciples had the same questions, and Jesus responds by telling them this parable about the tenacious widow and the unjust judge. Essentially, Jesus is saying - if even an unjust judge will eventually give in to a persistent call for justice by a woman he doesn't respect - then **how much more** will God, the exceedingly just judge, grant justice to God's beloved? So, take heart!

Though we need to be clear - Jesus is NOT saying that God will grant whatever justice we ask for, or that it will happen on our timeline. And because God's kingdom of justice hasn't arrived yet, Jesus encourages us to remain active, faithful, and courageous.

No matter how long it takes, or the odds we're facing, keep calling on God for justice, keep demanding it from the world, like a tireless, tenacious widow. And keep trusting that in the end, justice will be done.² One day, God's kingdom will come. We pray it every week, "your kingdom come, your will be done." The Son of Man will come again. And God's justice will come.

The question is what we do in the meantime. As people of faith - how do we respond in this time and place?

One of the best commentaries I've read, puts it this way:

... faith looks more like being bold than being pious. It looks like a persistent, pugnacious widow demanding justice — even threatening a corrupt judge with a (figurative) black eye! This is no mild, serene, “heavenly faith.” This is “faith on earth,” a bold, tenacious persistence amid circumstances that could easily lead to despair. This is the faith of keeping at it, staying with it, hoping against hope, refusing to take apparent defeat as the final word. This is the faith of a tenacious, pesky widow with a wicked right hand.³

Just picture it - with this parable Jesus insists that even the most corrupt powers-that-be **tremble** when they hear the widow approaching. Her persistence declares the good news of the Gospel: The kingdom of God has come near, and ultimately God's justice will not be denied.⁴

Friends, what does faith look like in a world like ours? Well, it might look like a pesky widow who persists. It might look like standing up for God's justice in the face of an unjust world. Proclaiming our allegiance to God above other kings. It might look like baptizing a child in world where that's increasingly rare, when faith is often dismissed.

But before we move on to the baptisms, I promised we'd circle back to our trip to Scotland. From Edinburgh to Inverness to Shetland and finally to Glasgow - we met amazing people. Of course, that required our engaging with people around us, and being willing to answer those difficult questions: Yes, we're Americans, and yes, things are complicated. Which often lead to conversations about gun control, politics, economics, immigration, and more. Then, there were the secondary follow up questions: "So, what do you do there for work?" Moving straight from politics to religion! Strangely enough, most people leaned into those conversations, asking questions and re-evaluating preconceptions.

Even though these weren't always the easiest conversations to have, our interactions with people were the very best part of our vacation. Which began with our taking the risk of engaging with the people around us. Even small, passing interactions mattered.

Which brings us to the ducks. If you've been here for baptisms, you know that often includes a duck or another squirt toy. Baptism is a radical act of faith, and choosing to commit oneself or one's child to God should be a joy-filled act, even for the child if possible. Hence the ducks.

As we left for vacation, I grabbed a bag of tiny plastic ducks, almost as an afterthought. I started carrying a pocketful and giving them out to people, a little piece of joy. A smile, a way to say hello, or thank you. Over the three weeks I gave out 100 ducks - "Here, have duck." It's hard to explain how happy they made people, young and old, of all walks of life.

So, this morning, as we celebrate baptisms and radical, persistent faith - I issue the Tiny Duck Challenge. In the entryway of the sanctuary, as you return your booklets, you are invited, challenged, to pick up a tiny duck or two, to give away. To share with someone who might appreciate a minute of joy. Being persistent people of faith in a broken world should hold moments of joy, should share moments of joy, even now.

I suppose we could go forth proclaiming, "The kingdom of God's love and justice has come near, don't lose heart." But I think it's okay if we begin with something a little easier, engaging those around us with a smile, and sharing a tiny bit of joy. "Here, have duck."

¹ Faith on Earth: SALT's Commentary for Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, saltproject.org posted October 13, 2025.

² Faith on Earth: SALT's Commentary for Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, saltproject.org posted October 13, 2025.

³ Faith on Earth: SALT's Commentary for Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, saltproject.org posted October 13, 2025.

⁴ Faith on Earth: SALT's Commentary for Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, saltproject.org posted October 13, 2025.