

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022

The Reverend Victoria Scott  
Church of the Ascension, Ottawa

Readings: [JEREMIAH 31:27-34; PSALM 119:97-104; 2 TIMOTHY 3:14-4:5; LUKE  
18:1-8](#)

**“God wants partners not puppets”**. I borrowed from theologian, minister and author Bruce Epperly when I first arrived, talking about our “holy adventure”.

“Partners not puppets” is another of his phrases, and it’s one that I go back to again and again.

Linked to “partners not puppets” is Desmond Tutu’s assertion:

**God without you, won’t. You without God, can’t.**

John Dominic Crossan offers commentary on this, imagining someone saying to Jesus: “You mean God’s not going to come and transform the world from a place of oppression and injustice and violence and impurity into a place of holiness, in an act of transcendental intervention?” Crossan imagines that Jesus would say “No, that’s why nothing is happening. You are waiting for God, and God is waiting for you.”

Our Gospel parable this morning is interesting in that Luke starts out by telling us what it’s about: we hear that “...Jesus told them a parable about their need to

pray always and not to lose heart.” Then we hear about an unjust judge, and a persistent widow who will not give up on demanding justice. So, this is not just about prayer. It is about prayer *and* justice. It’s not just about a state of being – prayerful, not losing heart – but about both being *and* doing. Praying, *and* living out – embodying – justice in partnership with God.

I invited you to think about “and” two weeks ago. To think about all the “ands” there are in this life, and to recognize that fullest living is found in moving between those “ands” – lament and praise, sorrow and joy...

This parable of prayer *and* justice is another look at “and”. Partners not puppets makes a crucial – fundamental “ –and”. It is God *and* us. God’s dream for the world is love, and justice, and peace, and truth. When we believe that we are partners not puppets, when we recognize that God is calling us to see that love and justice and peace and truth are not somewhere in the future, not some distant hope to be brought about by an act of transcendental intervention, but for us to embody – because God without us won’t, we without God can’t – then we will be fully human, we will be what God created us to be. We pray for justice – we open our eyes and hearts to God with us – *and* we embody justice with our words, our actions...

Jeremiah offers us more “and”. The story of Jeremiah takes us through both plucking up and sowing. Today’s passage offers us sowing, but before that sowing can happen there is tearing up and breaking down in order that the planting can happen. This invites us to see that life is both: both tearing down and building up. And, we discern whether tearing down or building up is next in partnership with God. Then, we hear “...I will be their God, and they shall be my people...”. We hear that the least to the greatest will know God, and that the law will be written on their hearts. There is partnership, here. There is no room for puppets in these words. This is about muscle memory, instincts, a kinship with the mind and heart of God so we needn’t check the rules but will spontaneously embody God’s way. Sam Wells speaks of this, suggesting that God isn’t a 911 resort in a crisis, but such a constant that we manage to steer clear of many crises...

In the passage we heard from 2 Timothy, Paul is dealing with a cultural crisis. We hear “A time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine but have itching ears, accumulating teachers to suit their own desires.” If this has been the case at various times throughout history, surely this time is now. Paul turns to Scripture as the answer. So much damage has been done in turning to Scripture for concrete, literal answers. Paul says that Scripture is “inspired by God”. It’s

“inspired.” Not dictated by God but inspired. In-spired means “breathed into.”

There is life, and movement, and partnership in this! God breathed life into this book, and God breathes life into us through it. We are called to engage, and to discern through Scripture, in partnership with God.

Partners not puppets. God and us, but also us and each other. We are made for community, and part of the reason why is so that we can move between the “ands” with one another. We can help one another to see the opportunities for partnership with God. We can remind one another that life is both “being” and “doing”.

One of the many wonderful things about our Anglican liturgy is that it models for us how we are to live in the world. Our Sunday worship has both “being”, and “doing” in it. We share in both “being” and “doing” when we gather here together.

After church today we’re going to spend some time focussing on the “doing” part of Sunday mornings. Scripture, song, prayer, sacrament and a caring community make for a blessed time, and “doing” is very much a part of it. Altar Guild,

Greeters, Sound, Musicians, Readers, Intercessors, Servers and Communion

Assistants, Coffee Hour Hosts, Sunday School teachers and Children’s Ministry

Volunteers: these are roles that have the potential to remind us, and to hold us in

that balance of “being” and “doing”. When we only have a few people in these roles there is the very real possibility of an imbalance for those individuals, and for “doing” to overtake “being”. Sharing in these roles holds us all in the balance between “being” and “doing”. And so, I’ll invite you to spend some time today thinking about what you might “do” on a Sunday morning as we continue to worship together in community here at Ascension. This will make space for those who are already volunteering to consider where they are finding themselves in this balance between being and doing.

We partner with God – because God without us won’t, and we without God, can’t – and we partner with one another in life. We partner with one another because we will face injustice in life just as the widow did in our parable this morning. We will need to be persistent in embodying love, and justice and peace, but we don’t need to do it alone. We are invited to move through this life looking for opportunities to partner with God. We do it together so that we can move between all the “ands”, including “being” and “doing”. We do it together so that we remember – so that we can remind one another – that we are not alone. God is with us, and we are with each other.

I invite you to think about the partnering with God and with one another that you do in this community at Ascension. How are you called to enter into the balance between being and doing on a Sunday morning? Then, go into the world remembering that you're a partner not a puppet. You're a beloved co-creator, invited to move gently between all the "ands" in life. In Jesus name. Amen.