The parable we just heard refers to an unjust judge and an assertive and persistent widow. The fact that she has to return to the judge over and over tells us she is not being served by the system and she is determined to be heard. The justice system is failing her but only because the judge seems uncommitted until she becomes a threat. He says to himself, “I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.” A closer and more honest translation would be, “I shall avenge her, or she will give me a black eye.” Systems are not perfect but only because they are put together and run by imperfect people. The judge’s inaction in the face of obvious need is evidence of his own spiritual brokenness. An unspoken cultural factor contributing to the widow’s predicament is that she is a woman and therefore with no social capital, and she is unprotected because left a widow, and therefore with no economical capital. In other words, she has no leverage and is left to fend for herself. The system has failed her. Her coming back to the judge becomes her prayer. She advocates for herself because she trusts in a fair outcome and demonstrates hope for a juster world. What we see her doing is faith in action, another definition for prayer.

Both individual people and systems fall but both can be redeemed. Everything and everyone is within God’s grace, and God’s purpose is to redeem and restore all back to life. So even though we are more sympathetic to the widow than to the judge, we better remind ourselves that both the widow and the judge are under God’s care. Because God’s grace is ultimately unfair, we cannot talk about one being outside God’s grace and the other being the sole recipient. What we must come to understand, especially in situations where we seem to be pitted against one another, where one has offended and done damage to the other, is that the Gospel is still for both the widow AND the judge. What they may hear is different. The Gospel comforts, but if it only comforts, we would be a people of cheap grace. The Gospel both challenges and afflicts. We are a people of both/and, simultaneously saint and sinner, and we are to be both challenged and comforted. We cannot just receive grace and not respond to the Gospel message. In this instance, the Gospel is a call to the judge to turn around and do his job.

A common mistake is to seek out those Bible passages that offer comfort and screen out those parts that threaten us. But the basic viewpoint of the biblical writers is that of victims, those who have been cruelly used by society, the poor and oppressed. Consequently, when those, who are pushed to the edge of society, hear the Bible offering hope and liberation to the oppressed of the ancient world, they hear hope and liberation being offered to them today. If God sided with the oppressed back then, they believe God continues to side with the oppressed here and now.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America understands the call to preach the Gospel to all the nations in terms of “accompaniment.” We walk together in faith with people of different languages, cultures, and customs seeking to serve God already present in all corners of the world. The FL-Bahamas Synod of the ELCA has four companion churches in the Caraibes: the Lutheran Church of Haiti (ELH), the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Guyana (ELCG), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Suriname (ELKS), and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cuba (IELC). With all of them, we watch out not to give what we think they need but learn from them the best ways to support them.

At this time, the FL-Bahamas Synod’s strongest relationship is with Haiti. The Lutheran Church in Haiti lives in the midst of chronic political uncertainty and social upheaval with daily protests, no jobs, no food, no electricity, raging inflation, and governmental corruption. People are starving and angry at the leadership which seems unable to respond to the crisis in a constructive way.[[1]](#footnote-1) The chair and coordinator of the Lutheran Church of Haiti, the Rev. Joseph Livenson, has suggested many projects aimed at empowering the local people to take responsibility for their progress. You may recall that Pr. Livenson preached at Nativity last Winter. The FL-Bahamas Synod has supported the Haitian church by working side by side, when possible, for the development of the faith and the economic growth of local families. We have provided support for the church roof and windows at Savanne Zombie; to help the church in Gressier, FL churches have collected funds for a fence, office space for Pr. Livenson and solar panels to secure a consistent source of electricity; for the church in Fonds des Negres, donations have allowed for the digging of a well. In addition to that, donations from our FL churches have provided local people with seeds to sow and goats to raise. Ten percent of the harvest and the new seeds, as well as baby goats, are returned to church volunteers who redistribute them to needy families. It has been observed that now families can have two meals a day. Pr. Livenson travels by a beat-up truck over unpaved roads to reach Lutheran churches that are spread out across mountains. That truck is constantly in need of new tires and repairs. He communicates with us whenever the internet is available.

The Lutheran Church in Guyana,[[2]](#footnote-2) founded by Dutch settlers over 270 years ago, suffers from a severe shortage of leaders. There are four ordained pastors for 35 congregations. Deacons help the pastors but more leaders are needed to reach especially the churches in extremely remote areas. Conversely, the Lutheran Church in Suriname,[[3]](#footnote-3) also a former Dutch colony until 1975, has 6 clergy and 5 churches. This country enjoys social stability and democratic freedoms. Our relationship with them is mostly for reciprocal spiritual support. The relations with the Lutheran Church in Cuba will be reestablished with a new delegation to Cuba this December. The ties we had in the past have been severed due to a lack of communication.

We walk in faith with the people of the world, seeking God’s justice for this suffering world. Our help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. Let our prayer show total trust in the Lord, the God of mercy and consolation; let our hearts be moved by the cry of the poor. Amen.

1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-50023443> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://elcguyana.org/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://ecclesia-suriname.com/churches-in-suriname.php> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)