

Blogging toward Sunday

By [Stan Wilson](#)

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Last year I attended a prayer vigil in downtown Jackson on the night of a scheduled execution. A hard rain was falling. I recognized a couple of people as fellow clergy and a couple of others as consistent advocates for justice in our small state. It was just a small crowd composed of those who have been praying and working against capital punishment for years.

The service called for some readings followed by a lengthy period of silence before the scheduled hour, followed by the tolling of the bells. Silence is never easy for me, so I was relieved when the bells began ringing, but the bells kept on ringing—they came in sets of three, followed by silence, then more bells. Before long I became antsy, wondering when they would quit. Were they ringing the age of the victim or the age of the man being executed? Apparently not; there were only the three rings followed by silence followed by ringing for what seemed an eternity.

In Luke 17 both the Pharisees and the disciples show signs of impatience for the coming kingdom. They seem to want it to go ahead and get here. The Pharisees ask when it will come, and the disciples want to know where to find it, but Jesus assures them only that it will not come before he suffers and is rejected. First comes the passion, and he teaches us that there is no shortcut to the end. We must be prepared for suffering and rejection also. We must be prepared for the long, costly transformation which must occur within us and all around us before his kingdom will be fully realized. It's not going to be easy, he insisted, and then he told them about this persistent widow.

As Luke makes plain, this is a parable for the long haul. It calls for our daily, persistent prayer for the justice of his kingdom: we are to keep our eyes on the prize and not grow weary.

My mostly white church shares my own discomfort with long, silent periods of prayer. We like to know when our worship is going to end. We prefer something

between 59 and 61 minutes, but the main thing is a definite end.

Yet every Sunday I drive home past one particular black church, and every Sunday the congregants are still in there praying long after our church has finished. I wonder about the restlessness of typical white worship. Is there a connection between our impatience and our sense that the kingdom is already here for us? Why keep pounding on the doors, begging for justice, when for us the world is pretty much justified?

This is a parable for widows, for the vulnerable and the poor. This is a parable for those who are enduring the passion which must come before the kingdom can come in its fullness. This is for those who know that there's a long way to go before this world is made right, and it's not going to make as much sense for those who are content already with the way things are.

This is also a parable about worship. Some in our congregation get frustrated when our worship seems boring and we do not stir up enough emotion, but since when is worship a time for us to feel good? If this parable is our guide, worship is best understood as part of the church's long and persistent prayer for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven.