

**THE BIBLICAL MESSAGES IN DR. SEUSS
GREEN EGGS AND HAM
JUNE 23 AND 24, 2018
Luke 18: 1-8; 2 Corinthians 5: 15-20**

After writing the Cat in the Hat using such few words, Theodore Geisel's publisher made him a bet. (They were obviously not United Methodist). At any rate, he bet Geisel \$50 that he couldn't write a whole book – a good book that would sell – with no more than 50 words. \$50 for 50 words.

Well, Geisel took that challenge. The result? Green Eggs and Ham. If you count the words, you'll find that Geisel used exactly 50 different words ... over and over again. And as Dr. Seuss' #1 selling book of all time ... I'll bet he made more than \$50.

The characters in Green Eggs and Ham are spot on ... from the spunky, rambunctiously persistent Sam-I-Am whose mission throughout the story is to persuade, compel, hound, and badger the obstinate, nay-sayer, whose name is never revealed, to eat a most unusual dish -- green eggs and ham.

In the end Sam-I-Am gets his wish. Worn weary from Sam's persistence, the other fellow finally tries the delectable dish and wonder of wonder, he likes green eggs and ham! And he ends up thanking Sam-I-Am for introducing him to something new.

We can relate to Sam-I-Am and his friend. We all know people, like Sam, who try to convince us to try new things all the time; and who seek to change our minds and our perspectives.

And we all know people like Sam's friend, those who refuse to change their minds about anything or whose answer to anything new is "NO!", people who are resistant to hearing new ideas or perspectives, especially when those new perspectives make us feel uncomfortable.

And we all know about waiting ... waiting in line, waiting for answers, waiting for an appointment, waiting for someone to do what we've asked ... waiting for our persistence to pay off.

The storyline of Green Eggs and Ham sounds an awful lot like our Gospel reading for today. Jesus tells the Parable of a widow who's also persistent and refuses to give up. She's at the bottom of the social ladder. She's poor and powerless, and has been denied justice.

Then there's the judge. He's the typical bad guy. He admits he neither fears God nor respects human rights.

The widow approaches the judge again and again, asking him to grant her justice against her opponent. The judge refuses at first but finally decides to give her what she wants. The story, according to scholars, it meant to be somewhat comic. The judge is supposed to represent God.

Of course, he's about as opposite to God as he can get in his motives which are quite self-serving to the end. It takes a long time for the widow to finally get anything out of the judge, but he finally grants the widow's plea, not because he decides to do good, but only because he's sick and tired of being pestered by her.

But now, listen to Jesus' conclusion to the parable:

And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸ I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

If even someone as slimy as a crooked judge can finally be goaded to enact a just ruling, how much more can we count on a loving and mindful God to respect our tireless pleas for justice. But, God's "quickly", isn't the same as our "quickly".

And this is hard because our world operates by instant gratification. We want immediate results, same day shipping. God moves at a different pace, keeps a different time. Even when Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God, he describes it in terms of plants growing and yeast rising. There's not a thing in the world we can do to make a plant grow or bread rise, but give them the best possible conditions and ... wait.

Just like Sam-I-Am who did everything possible to make those green eggs attractive to his friend, God is working for

good, for reconciliation, for restoration, for peace and invites us to join him.

Christian faith is a restless faith. It should always respond with frustration and persistence when it comes to the brokenness and injustices of our societies and our very selves. Christian faith believes God has made a *nonnegotiable* commitment to bring better things into being.

It also channels that restlessness into Sam-I-Am, widow-like persistence and advocacy. This advocacy uses whatever tools are available: sometimes wealth and political influence, sometimes persistence and annoyance, sometimes reckless love, sometimes a willingness to expose absurd and inhuman practices, sometimes slimy, crooked judges. Christian faith does whatever it takes to make change, even if only a little.

Involving ourselves within issues of justice — serving those who need justice — is an example of following Jesus — of partnering with God to end injustices. Throughout the world there are millions of people who are suffering. But, like Sam's friend, many Christians remain simply apathetic, ignorant, or refuse to admit any problems exist. Many are uncomfortable facing complex and controversial issues.

We should not be okay with the way the world is, just as the widow in the parable was not okay with her situation. We should not be okay with injustice, oppression and violence. We should not be okay with economic systems

that only widen the gap between super-rich and poor. We should not be okay with discrimination. Just like the widow, we should not rest until the way things are become the way things should be.

Participating in justice issues is a tradition inspired by Jesus. It's a deeply spiritual practice. Rather than being motivated by political affiliation, financial gain, power, pride, or control, we should be active participants for the sake of following Jesus — for the purpose of glorifying God through acts of justice, empowerment, and love. Sometimes we may have to take a stand and deliver messages that will be rejected like Sam's green eggs. But, as we're emboldened to take such stands, God will be working with us (and in us), and we'll be working with God to bring justice, reconciliation and restoration.

But there's also another dimension. God is not coercive, but persuasive. It's the power of God's persuasion, through the Holy Spirit, that transforms us -- that changes our minds, changes our hearts, changes our behavior, changes our lives, changes the world. It's the Holy Spirit's persistent tapping in hearts that moves us from personal faith to living out our faith in the world. We have every right to look after our personal needs and desires. God wants us to enjoy life. But we must balance our personal faith with a faith that calls us to partner with God in our responsibilities to others.

New Testament scholar Fred Craddock tells a story about a dream. In the dream, he was invited as a friend to spend the night in the big house, God's house. He was, of course, excited as a first-time visitor to the House of Many Rooms.

Angels showed him around and answered his endless questions. The food was heavenly, you could say, and at bedtime he was shown to a room of his own. The excitement of the day finally resolved into weariness and weariness into rest. His bed was a cloud. To the soft sound of music coming from everywhere, he drifted into sleep.

But sometime during the night his sleep was interrupted by sounds from the next room. He didn't know who was in that room, but somebody was having a bad night. The noise was not snoring, nor did it seem to be sleep-talking. He listened more carefully; maybe it was groaning or moaning made worse by tossing and turning. He thought once to knock on the door, but was afraid to. He dared not call out lest he add to that person's discomfort and perhaps wake others. So he tolerated it till morning, catching only snatches of sleep. At daybreak he heard the person next door move about the room and then step out into the hall. He did the same, wanting to see who it was, and, if appropriate, express regret that the night was so restless.

It was God.

He was shocked; God restless and unable to sleep? The God who blesses with peace beyond understanding, the God who hushes even a whimpering child? God looked at him and said, "I'm sorry if I disturbed your sleep. I know my groaning was a disturbance, but I couldn't get my mind off all my hurting children down there."

"Oh my," Fred asked, "Is there anything I can do."

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"Yes," said God. "Yes, there is."

Let us pray:

Grant us, Lord God, a vision of your world as your love would have it: a world where the weak are protected, and none go hungry or poor; a world where the riches of creation are shared, and everyone can enjoy them; a world where different races and cultures live in harmony and mutual respect; a world where peace is built with justice, and justice is guided by love. Give us the persistence and courage to build it, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.