

Diocese of Derby
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The Diocese of Derby Clergy Conference 2025

The Sleepy Friend and the Irascible Judge

Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick
14th October 2025
Rev'd Canon Professor Richard A. Burridge




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Overall theme: Portrayals of God??

The Parable of the Sower (Mark 4.1-20) Yesterday

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"from little acorns, large oak trees grow"




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Parables as allegory: e.g the **Wheat and the Weeds**, where the enemy (devil) sows weeds in (God's) field (Matt. 13.24-30).

But **allegorising parables runs into trouble:** the **Friend at Midnight** (Luke 11.5-8) importunes someone for bread?

Allegory: the one being importuned = God. But **God is tucked up in bed** with his family, and cannot get up to give him something. Who is the family, and what is the image of God?!

What kind of help is a God who can't be bothered to get out of bed because he's tucked up in bed with his family?!

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Parables as allegory: Even worse with the **Parable of the Widow** who kept pestering the **Unjust Judge** (Luke 18.1-8). Is Jesus really saying that God is like an unjust judge who only gives in if we bang on the door hard enough and annoy him sufficiently?

Both parables are unique to Luke's gospel = **'L' material?** Unusually for Luke, little narrative context or a general introduction in Lk. 18.1 – 'pray always, not to lose heart'

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11.1-5: The Lord's Prayer

Opening prayers for hallowing of God's name, his will and kingdom.

Basic petitions: daily needs, bread and forgiveness.

Do not bring us to the peirasmos, the testing time

Straight into the Friend

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The Impertunate Neighbour
by Holman Hunt (1895)

Ancient laws of hospitality for travellers: e.g. Abraham's visitors at Mamre (Gen 18)

'Friend' = both **host & guest** in relationship; very sacred custom in ancient world

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Google images: tucked up in a modern bed, sheets and pillow.

In ancient world, everyone slept together, in mats on floor, probably with animals.

The friend getting out of bed would wake everyone else up, hence refusal of sacred duty.

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Even when he gives his friend 3 bread rolls, he is depicted as doing it very grumpily and giving them only in a grudging way = God??!!



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Eugène Burnand was deeply religious, best known for his illustrations of the Parables. 1872 Fine Arts School Paris. Level of realism and focus on emotions being conveyed.

The judge dressed in **white** is fed up and looking away from the woman; and **the widow** dressed in **black** is seen begging, kneeling in front of the judge.

The Iniquitous Judge, Eugène Burnand (1850-1921); Pastels, pencil and crayons, drawn c. 1910

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The widow's request 'vindicate' / 'justify' Pauline term

ἑκδίκησόν με ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀντιδίκου μου

A Judge as arbiter between disputing parties; delay – waiting for a bribe?

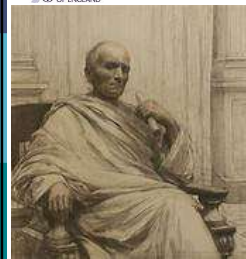


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Who is the judge? Allegory = God? Yet the judge 'does not fear God nor have any respect for human beings?'

ὁ κριτὴς τῆς ἀδικίας

Widow causes trouble: 'wear out'?

κόπος beating, wear out, afflict

ὕπωπιάζω strike under the eye, give someone a black eye

So he decides to 'give justice'

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What is the point? Persistence? But why??
Is God a reluctant giver? Did those questions lead to 11.7-8?
Does God need us nagging him to give us 'justice' or to 'justify' us?
ποιήσῃ τὴν ἐκδίκησιν τῶν ἐκλεκτῶν αὐτοῦ τῶν βοῶντων αὐτῷ ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός : 'Justice/judgement' and 'elect/chosen'
Or do WE need our nagging? Do we need to remind ourselves of the abundant generosity of God – back to Sower?
Yet this time, it is not just a crazy exaggeration of the character of the abundantly generous nature of God.
Neither the Friend nor the Judge are 'generous' – quite the reverse.
It is a '**a minori ad maius**' argument – from the smaller to greater
If even these grumpy, sinful humans give justice, how much more will our abundantly generous God. So it is a different way of giving the same message.

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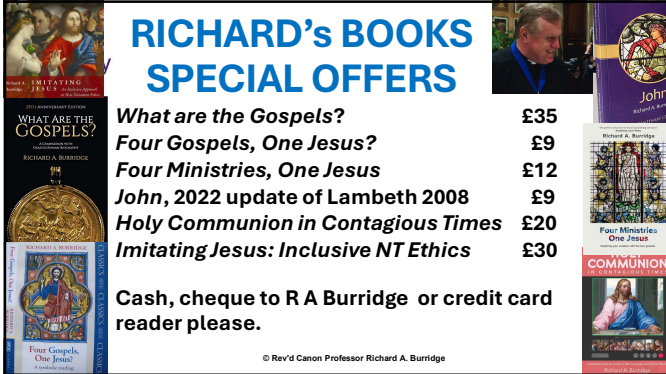
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