

St. Michael's Church
Sunday 9 August 2020
The Boxer

Can you identify the song from the following lyrics: "I am just a poor boy/Though my story's seldom told/I have squandered my resistance/For a pocket full of mumbles, such are promises/ All lies and jests/ Still a man hears what he wants to hear/ And disregards the rest." For the past week I have been listening to this song, and tempted to break out into singing if not for the pain it would cause the artist and each of you. The song is *The Boxer*, written by Paul Simon, and one of the more memorable songs on Simon and Garfunkel's 1970 album, *Bridge Over Troubled Water*. Paul Simon was celebrated in many circles as an established singer/songwriter; but as with any success, there was a mound of criticism that was following close behind.

One of my college professors--a classmate of Paul Simon at Queen's College in NYC in the early 1960's-- said that administrators, faculty, and even students didn't believe that Simon would not make it as a musician. Maybe it was because he was too short, or didn't have the mystique of Bob Dylan. Possibly the lyrics didn't fully address the tension our country was experiencing, or the beat was too soft or too strong. There are even some people who don't like individuals who have a dream and a goal which they hold onto and fulfill, because they themselves didn't hold onto their own personal dream and ultimately gave up. The details of criticism are not important, except to the recipient; rather, what's important is the message to not give up on a belief, on a dream that God has placed on your heart, which aligns our will to His will, and ignites the passion that God has individualized for each one of us.

Paul Simon never gave up. In 1990 Simon and Garfunkel were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and then in 2001 Paul Simon was inducted as a solo artist. The last verse of *The Boxer* is both telling and fitting in light of Simon's ultimate accomplishments as an artist: "In the clearing sounds a boxer/ And a fighter by his trade/ And he carries the reminders/ Of ev'ry glove that laid him down/ Or cut him till he cried out/ In his anger and his shame/ 'I am leaving, I am leaving'/ But the fighter still remains."

There are a couple of Biblical references in *The Boxer*, so I was wonder if Simon was also familiar with today's Gospel reading of the Widow and the Judge. In the case of Simon and the Widow, both are boxers. The Widow repeatedly comes before the Unjust Judge to receive justice from an adversary. The reason for justice is unidentified, and the Widow is not given a name. It's as if Jesus is inviting the Disciples to place themselves inside the parable, to see what it's like to stand alone on issues of justice, and what it's like to stand next to another in an identical circumstance.

And so the Widow comes repeatedly, daily, before a Judge who neither fears God nor cares about man. But the Judge also knows that the Widow will not give up until she receives what

God has placed on her mind and heart. And the Widow enters the ring where the Judge resides, and the Widow never lets up. The Judge thinks to himself that if he does not give in, the Widow will wear him out, bothering him and beating him down. The translation from the Greek is much more fun and interesting. The Widow will literally stun, bruise, and even give the Judge a black eye, if he does not provide what's being asked for...and so he does. It's as if the Judge lets Muhammed Ali into the ring, knowing that the man that stands before him can float like a butterfly and sting like a bee.

It's easy to forget that—with such language and images of boxing—that this story is a parable that Jesus tells about prayer. Jesus always uses unusual and striking images, no pun intended, to not only capture the attention of the Disciples, but also our attention. And we are invited to enter the parable, and it's easy to find our place alongside the Widow. How often have we put on the gloves and entered the ring to stand for someone and beside someone...possibly grandparents, parents, children, a spouse, a friend, and/or a colleague.

It's also easy to forget that God is not the unjust Judge, as tempting and as easy it can be to blame Him; rather, he is the God of love, and he wants us to come back to him over and over so that our will be aligned with His will, and that what is on our heart will be recognized as what God has placed there in our time of prayer and personal relationship with Him.

And most important, it's easy to forget that Jesus wants us to focus on the Widow, and to extend her persistence to how Jesus wants us to come to him in daily relationship and prayer, the most intimate and important relationship we can have. He wants us to put the boxing gloves down and pick up hands and feet of prayer. He wants us to make war on the floor, so that each day we know Jesus better and better as our personal friend and Savior, not just in heaven but on earth. And he wants us to reach the point in that relationship where we trust Him with our most precious thoughts, gifts, dreams, and people. So that when that prayer is answered—whether it is in a day or a year or beyond—we will recognize the prayer as answered. Maybe not as we planned or thought but as perfect because our will is aligned perfectly with the will of Jesus for our lives.

But most important, we will recognize the One who answered the prayer, Jesus Christ, and see more fully that He is the healer, the promise keeper, and the One who will walk faithfully with us with each step and breathe of every day. Amen!

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