

What kind of God

Luke 18 begins with a story, both comic and serious. Here is a judge who, we are told explicitly, cared for neither God nor man. Does that imply that he is in a good position to 'truly and indifferently minister justice' or that he is totally disqualified for the post of judge?

Here is a widow, at grave risk without the support of a male relative. But because the judge is indifferent to her entreaties she has to make a serious nuisance of herself—and persistently so—in order to attract his attention.

The story goes on to describe how the judge finally gives in, not because of the merit of the woman's case but simply because she is such a nuisance.

Jesus' comment is a typical instance of the 'how much more' reasoning he uses so often, and not only in Luke's gospel: remember this *if you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your heavenly father give good gifts to those who ask him*. Here the contrast is between a picture of God as grumpy and unprofessional, self-obsessed and uncaring, not fit to dispense justice, and a God who is always on the lookout for ways to bring justice to his children, especially the least and lowest among them.

What kind of God are you looking for? This is the question that seems to lie behind Jesus' story. In the first-century context I suppose it's the kind of question we might now call rhetorical; no-one would seriously have entertained the idea that God really was like that judge. But that makes the question all the more pointed. If you really do understand what God is like, why don't you reflect that belief in the way you live?

Fr Gerard Hughes describes how, at one time in his life, he thought of God as a stern and strict policeman; nothing he ever did could escape the eye of this policeman. Young Gerard was always afraid of that God, always hoping to find a way of being invisible, always trying to hide, always fearful of being spotted, having his collar felt, and being brought up before the beak.

Only later did Gerard discover another God, a God who loved and cared for him. Eventually he was able to conquer his fear of the policeman god and relate to the true God and Father of our Lord Jesus.

If you aren't looking for God, why are you reading this? What kind of God are you expecting to find? The indifferent, the dangerous, the threatening, the inviting, the challenging, the loving?

Perhaps the God you might expect to find in your wanderings is a God who, having created this world and everything and everyone in it, is aloof and indifferent to our human condition. Jesus' little parable offers a kind of field guide to God. A God who is passionate about justice for his children, especially for the most vulnerable among them. A God who invites us to share his passion for justice. A God who invites us to join his family and travel with him.

Christians sometimes talk rather glibly about our relationship with God while overlooking the implication that God has a relationship with us. We wonder what it might be like to have a relationship with God, and hardly ever give a thought to what it might feel like for God to have a relationship with us. This little story serves as a prompt for more thought along those lines.

The final punch line of the story is strange. Jesus asks will God find faith when he comes? Lurking here is another implied question: what kind of you is God looking for?