

## "Persistent"

Genesis 32:22-31; 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5; Luke 18:1-8

October 17, 2010

The scriptures are incredible again this week. I suppose that saying that could lead to the perception that some time they are not so incredible. I certainly do not want to suggest that but certainly there are times when the Word of God grabs a person more firmly than at other times.

They are great texts ..... At one point I almost gave up thinking that they were a little too great ... Too much in them ... Too many directions to go ... Too much that would have to be said - I could very easily spend hours talking about each one of the 4 scriptures that you have just heard read. The Psalm is either my favorite psalm or it is at least in the top 3 .... And I am going to ignore it all together. The second lesson is so important as a word of encouragement to a young preacher and to you and me as we struggle with sharing our faith. But it is also an important word about the very nature of God's Word - the Bible - inspired - God-breathed. .... And then there are the beautiful events and images in the 1<sup>st</sup> Lesson and the Gospel text.

It is too much .... And I found that I had no idea which way to go with it all. At least not until I listened to a couple of seminary professors talking about this Gospel text. One was saying to the other, "Oh, it is such a great parable." And the other responded with, "Oh, yah!!! What so great about it?" Clearly it is a difficult parable but it did not seem as though that second professor was convinced that it was such a great parable. "What's really so great about this parable," she asked. And the other responded, "Well, for one thing, it is a great parable because it's not true!"

I don't know if a comment like that would get your attention like it did mine, or not. We just read from the letter to Timothy that explained that all of scripture is "God-breathed" - inspired. To have anyone, let alone a Lutheran seminary professor suggested that the words of Jesus are not true gets my attention and is a bit disturbing. So what is not true? An unjust judge refuses to do anything about the complaint that the persistent widow brings before him. There is no indication that the judge acts improperly. Perhaps in his eyes the case had no merit. And no matter how you might want to help out someone that is upset and perhaps, in need, still, there are rules to follow. The problem was simply that she felt that she was not getting a fair deal. So she came back every day .... Day after day .... Week after week. It could happen. Finally it was enough .... The woman just kept coming until the judge was tired of it all. He was tired of seeing her in his court room and I suspect that he was getting a bit embarrassed by the whole thing so finally, he just gave in and gave her everything she was asking for. It is there that things start getting a bit tricky. - - - What is the point? What are we supposed to learn? What does it say about God?

Luke begins by telling us that the point of the parable that Jesus is about to tell is about being diligent in prayer and never to lose heart. And often it is suggest that we just have to keep praying for God to respond in the same way the widow kept pestering the unrighteous judge. It makes sense. But then we are reminded that God is not like the unrighteous judge. God is totally righteous and is not like the unrighteous judge .... Rather God is quick to answer our prayers ..... Quick to respond to our needs.

This is the point at which the comment of that seminary professor comes in. "It's a great parable .... it's great because it is not true!" 'WOW .... How dare he say such a thing.' That was my first reaction but then I thought, 'He's right .... But how dare he say that God doesn't answer our prayers or grant justice quickly.'

Still, the comment made me think of all of the injustice in the world .... Injustice that has leads to countless prayers that have gone up from around the world over long years of suffering. And the suffering does not quickly turn to justice for all no matter how many prayers we say. And I think of all of the times when I have sat with people who have been going through incredibly difficult times in their lives and prayers have been offered again and again without immediate resolution floating down from heaven the way we would hope. Doesn't God answer prayer? I have heard the question so often .... Many times through tears and deep emotion.

It is an interesting parable .... An interesting text that moves us from an unrighteous judge and a persistent widow to a call for us to remain faithful. "I tell you, God will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?"

Now that is a good question. Will we remain faithful? Will we remain faithful when injustice and suffering and struggle continues despite our prayers. Will we remain faithful even when we are disappointed or frustrated or angry or simply can not understand the things that we experience in our lives?

There's a great scene in the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, in which Tevye turns to his wife Golda -- the woman he married years before, in a marriage arranged by their parents -- and asks her in song, "Golda, do you love me?" "Do I what?" Golda sings back. "For 25 years I've washed your clothes, cooked your meals, shared your bed, raised your children, and now you ask, 'Do I love you?' " "I know, Golda," says Tevye, "and I'm grateful, but do you love me?" They go on for a while with this back-and-forth exchange, but by the end of it they've come to the conclusion that, yes, the two of them do love each other, deeply. When they look at all they've been through together, it's the only logical conclusion. Tevye and Golda are in love.

Sometimes you just have to hang in there. Sometimes you have to just keeping doing the things that you have to do. Persistent - working it through - struggling. You do it because you know that you love each other - you know that you have faith. Don't give up!

Jacob wrestles with God through a long dark night. It is one of the truly great stories of the Bible. Jacob has been a rotten person many times in his life ... especially in relationship to

his twin brother. He has tricked him out of his birthright and his blessing - he has been at odds with his brother to the point that years have past when they have not spoken to each other. Now he has received word that his brother is coming to see him with 500 men with him. He fears the worst. He wants to be reconciled. He wants to run away. I wonder what his prayers have been over the years when he has been afraid to even speak to his brother. The next day he knows that he will stand face to face with his brother. He can not sleep. He tosses and turns. And he wrestles with God .... through the long night he wrestles. As the sun rises he is left wounded and limping. But the day will finally bring the resolution to the pain for which he has prayed for so long.

"I tell you God will quickly grant justice." Is it true. Yes. But we are often such a stiff necked people living among so many stiff necked people that have their own plans that it takes time for us to be reshaped by Gods Word. Will God find faith when He come? Be persistent. Keep doing the laundry through the years. Hold on. Wrestle through the long nights. Pray always and never lose heart. God is the righteous judge and hears our prayers even in those time when is does not seem to be true. God wrestles with us so that we might have life. AMEN