

Luke 18:1-8

Grace and peace to you from the one who was, who is and who is to come. Amen.

What is the first image that appears in your mind when I say the word persevere? Do you think of old childhood stories like the tortoise and the hare? You know slow and steady wins the race.

Or how about the little train that could? Chugging up the hill despite not thinking for awhile that he could, then finally making it up and over the top. Definitely good images of perseverance.

Or maybe you think of a story of an athlete who had to overcome something in their life in order to achieve great things on the field that made them famous.

Or maybe you think of a person like Christopher Reeve... someone who seemed to have it all and then have it all taken away in a split second accident. And even though life could have seemed like it was over, continued to live and work for what he believed in until his unexpected death this past week. Certainly a picture of what it means to persevere.

Perhaps when you hear that word you think of a famous quote...one that takes you through your days that never seem to end. You know the days I mean...the ones where nothing seems to be going right, all the problems are your fault, and all you want to do is give up and walk away. Do you look at something that says Albert Einstein's words, "It's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer." Or how about Robert Schuler's who said that "Problem's are not stop signs, they are guidelines." Again, excellent illustrations of perseverance, and ones that I'm sure we can look to for comfort and encouragement.

Now, I have to ask. How many of you, when I asked you to think of what you see when I say persevere, thought of a widow who had a legal problem? Maybe a few of you did because of the Gospel text we heard a few minutes ago, but I doubt the majority of you thought of this woman that we heard about today.

But a picture of perseverance is just what she is, isn't she? She had something done to her that was wrong that the law should have fixed, and so she went repeatedly to the judge until she got what was hers in the eyes of the law. Now, don't you wish we knew more about her so that we could learn more from her? Was she older or younger? What exactly did happen that she was wronged? Did she actually have appointments to see the judge each day, or was it just every few weeks that she appeared again and again? What was the justice that she was granted? Was it money...a title...land? We really don't know. But we do know that she didn't give up on what she thought was right, and for that reason was granted justice.

When we look farther into this parable, we don't know much about the judge either, do we? All we know is that this widow went to him and he refused to help her for a time. What was he waiting for? Was he waiting to be bribed by one party or another? (This wouldn't have been such an odd thing in this time period.) Was he just waiting to see how long the widow would keep coming back? Unfortunately for him, she did keep coming back. Why didn't he just give up and turn his back on her? Because she just would show up the next day anyway? She knew that what she was asking for was right and for that reason she was not going to give up. And what really was the straw that broke the camel's back that made him say that 'though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice.' Is that really the conclusion that an unjust judge would come to?

Now, I don't know about you, but when I first looked at this parable, I wasn't sure what to think...many times with Jesus' parables, we are able to put ourselves into the role of one of the characters and God into another, and by doing that we are able to learn a lesson that we can take with us. But looking at this parable, I wasn't so sure.

I'm not sure that I want to be the widow...yes, she gets what she wants, but in the process she becomes this person who is a burden...this nuisance who is to be tolerated until I get what I want. Now, my parents might tell you that that was my strategy as a little girl, but hopefully I've outgrown that. Is this parable telling me to go back to my childhood asking for the things I KNOW I need until I get them? What kind of lesson is that? Do we really think that if we ask often enough we will get whatever it is that we are asking for? No, I don't think that I want to be the widow in this case.

And if we **are** the widow, that makes God the judge. The one who gives us whatever we want just because we continually ask for it. Now, I don't know about you, but I've asked for that pile of money at the foot of my bed many times, and it's not there yet. I don't think that God answers our prayers simply because we pray them just enough times or even more troubling, because we become bothersome to God. How would you answer to the one who questions why their loved one dies anyway or why the tornado hit their house? Well, you just didn't pray enough times, I guess. No, I don't think that those are the roles in this one.

Then what about the judge? Is this who we should want to be in the parable? Do we really want to be the one who gives in just so he doesn't have to be annoyed anymore? In fact, in some translations, he gives into the woman because he doesn't want her to come and smack him in the face! He's scared of a widow, and just gives her what she wants so that she will go away. Is that what we do with God? Do we do the little that we think that God asks of us so that God will just leave us alone for awhile? That's something to think about, isn't it?

So if we are the judge, that puts God into the role of the widow, right? God becomes the one who knows what justice is and hounds those of us who do not until we figure things out. God becomes the one who visits with us everyday until we hear the words that we

need to hear. God becomes the one who is the outcast in society and ignored until God fits our needs. Not very comforting thoughts at first, are they?

But when you think about them for a bit, they become a sort of comfort. I think it is a comfort to know that God is with us whether we know it or not. God is with us whether we like it or not. Have you had those moments? Maybe it is that feeling we get when we know we are doing something wrong and we are still doing it...God is still there with us, waiting for us to come back to him. Maybe it is a tugging on your heart to share the Gospel in some setting that might be uncomfortable... with your neighbor or your fellow workers...or that homeless person that happens to be on your way to work. No one says that you have to get up and preach a sermon to them...just share what you have. Or maybe that pull is to preaching and teaching, and you have been trying valiantly to ignore that call that seems so apparent in your life. Any way that you look at it, God is going to be there until we see what needs to change, and then justice, God's will, will be served.

Just as the widow was not going to leave the judge alone, neither will God leave us alone. No matter how much the judge might have wanted to widow to just go away, she was always right there, hounding him. No matter what we face, the injustice of the world around us, no matter whether we are part of it or just on the sidelines, God will not leave us alone. I think this must have been the thoughts of our psalm writer for today. 'My help comes from the Lord...he will not let you stumble and fall...the one who watches over you will not sleep. The Lord stands beside you as your protective shade. The Lord keeps you from all evil and preserves your life. The lord keeps watch over you as you come and go, both now and forever.' These words were written to be used as one was traveling through un-welcoming country...a place that seemed to be god-less in its' ways. The writer knew that the only thing that would get them through was knowing that God was always going to be there to watch over them. How comforting that can be in our lives today! We don't have to do anything! We aren't doing anything! We are just like that judge who made up his mind about what we were going to do, and God is not going to leave us alone until we see God's will and plan and grace...in our lives. God is here, and we need to know that fact.

So what does this mean for us here today? I doubt that many of us are judges in the formal sense, but yet we judge everyday. And how often do we not hear the voice of the one speaking to us...guiding us in what is right and where to go? As we go through this week, I encourage all of us to take time to listen... to listen to that God who is speaking to us and guiding us in the way that he wants us to go. Listen to that one who perseveres with us even when we are not aware that he is by our side. And let us persevere with him as we go on our way, in our prayers and in our lives, thanking God that he neither tires nor sleeps, but will watch over us no matter which way that we go. Thanks be to God for that. Amen.

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