

Persistence

Year C

Season of Pentecost

Sunday Between October 16 and October 22 Inclusive

October 17, 2010, 21st Sunday After Pentecost

Read the Bible passage: [Luke 18:1-8](#), The Message; or [Luke 18:1-8](#), The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Faith-provoking, historical insights into the lesson by [David Ewart, Luke 18:1-8](#).

Click here: [George Hermanson's sermon](#), for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this sermon.

The Rev. Dr. George Hermanson

Note: This sermon was preached October 21, 2007 at Edwards (Knox) United Church.

What a curious story this is! This feisty widow. The story would have been even more puzzling to Luke's readers. Roles were very closely defined. Women had to know their place. Yet again, Jesus makes the rebel the hero of the story. This would have been a challenging story. Luke used it as a teaching story.

So we ask, again, what was going on in the social system of the times?

We know that there was no support system, no welfare for those in her situation. It would have been up to the family to provide for her and this seems to have failed. She demands that she have some justice.

So here we have an old woman, probably about 98 pounds- at least is how I see her in my imagination - who keeps on pestering a judge until he finally gets off his duff and deals with her complaint. The text even tells us that he is lazy and corrupt and only deals with her because he finally realizes that she will not stop bothering him and he will have no peace until he does. Hardly a good role model. He should come with a sign - "Warning! Christians do not act like this!"

And she's not much better, really. She doesn't fit our ideas of proper role models for women. She's not polite. She doesn't stay in her place. She continually bothers an important man and keeps him from his important community work. She is more like a raging granny - a first century raging granny - than the women we hold up in the church as saintly role models for young women to emulate. I bet she wears a red hat too.

It is important to understand that the judge only responds because of her persistence. He did not say the case had merit. He did not rule because he was impartial or just. He just got tired of being beaten black and blue (this is what the Greek suggests) by her continual coming to demand vindication.

Luke uses this story to talk about the power of persistent prayer. That prayer is a trust in God and that leads to action. In trust one can walk a prayer - our life is to be a walking prayer. He suggests that walking begins in a spiritual discipline of seeking God and looking for the hints of God in the world by asking what is needed here? It is to ask deep questions about our context. It is to ask what are our strengths? What can we give to a situation and be persistent in that offering?

The story rings true because we all have had experience of the power of persistence to change reality. It has nothing to do with physical strength or gender. It is about attitude.

I have been gifted by persistent women. My mother was a gentle woman but when she saw a need she was there. Even when she was sick with cancer that did not stop her from walking her prayer for others - she persistently resisted her illness.

Another was my aunt, who was nursing matron in Taiwan. When the Nationalists were driven out of China they came to Taiwan and there was a civil war. The Nationalists took over her hospital. To get the doctors from their homes she would walk them through the fire zone. She said, "They will never fire at a blonde Swede." Finally, her patience was pushed and she went to the commander and told him to get his troops out of the hospital, and they left. Later she said, "I was so mad that I forgot to take my apron off."

What these women shared was a deep prayer life - praying for the world lead them to working in the world for its healing.

The other thing was they asked what is the need here? They didn't say, "Someone else should do this." The very asking of what was needed gave the widow her task. To be persistent until justice was done.

The first thing about prayer is it focuses on what is needed. Then we ask how can we help? What can we offer to the situation?

It is crucial to focus on the strengths we have, to know our limitations, and to know that whatever we offer is good enough for the moment. It is important to focus on what is in front of us. And each resolution gives a new and obvious direction for our action. It is to begin in, who we are and who are the others with us, and then collectively we create a larger ground swell of action.

Luke suggested that prayer creates this ground swell of action. He offers us a picture of God who listens and responds. He suggests the vocation of the Christian is to pray without ceasing. Now that is not merely words. It is also action. Our heart is formed in prayer so our life is a prayer. This is what our Moderator suggests in his letter - which is posted at the back. We are not to worry about growth and survival. Our focus is on sharing the faith and doing justice.

It is well known that 80% of people who come to the church are brought by friends and family. It is our excitement that lures others into the pray life of a community. Thus, our primary job is to be persistent in forming the habits of the heart that shows the love of God in all our activity. As the hymn suggests: "They will know we are Christians by our love."

George Hermanson

May the Lure be with you

Prayer is an interactive enterprise. God depends on our prayers. For our prayers tell us what is important, what is need in this context. And God responds with a aim of love.

The widow knew what was needed, and did not stop. Prayer helps us walk the walk, especially when it seems we cannot succeed, that the negative forces conspire against us. Prayer gives us the resolve and strength to keep on keeping on. For in praying there is a feedback loop. We feel the presence of God in our lives.

One of the strengths of this congregation is its compassion and concern for others. My friend Chris said she felt warmth here. Maybe that is our strength. We could become a center for prayer, for persons, for the community and for the world. Maybe, besides Sunday, we might open the church one night a week for prayer time: learn methods of prayer, teaching them and living them. It is something to pray about.

There is something more, though. This prayer of unceasing can give each of us resolve in the dealing with the issues we face - the personal and beyond. A friend loses in the election yet her prayer life says this is not an end. "Poverty is still around us and I can continue to work to make this no longer a reality." Her faith gives her persistence.

We can apply this attitude to all things that are worthy of us and will add to our society. It is like Bruce Cockburn's song, *Lovers in a Dangerous Time*. "Kick at the darkness until it bleeds daylight."

Deep prayer gives us the persistence to kick against all the dark places so the light can come in. Persistence does break down the walls of hate to let the love come in. It begins in who am I and to whom do I belong? It is to take a measure of our context and to know that through us God works, because we belong to God and the love of God keeps coming to us who call day and night. It comes when we pray. "Come God and fill us, help us walk the walk of love."

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