

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Watertown, WI**

**“Perseverance”**

April 2020

Luke 18:1-7

Have you ever noticed how God holds up “perseverance”? He wants us to be a people who persevere, and so he gives us examples, models of the faith. For example, I’m thinking of that Canaanite woman. Remember her? She was desperately seeking help for her daughter. But Jesus is kind of rough with her. First, he ignores her, answers her not a word, which is unusual, but it isn’t enough to thwart her. So, he says, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” In other words, “I’m not here for Canaanites.” Still she doesn’t give up, but cries all the louder, “Lord, help me!” He answers, “It’s not right! It’s not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” (Did a Jewish rabbi just call a Canaanite woman a dog?) Still, she hangs in there. She does not give up. She does not leave with a huff and a puff. No, this woman perseveres. She will not be thwarted. She comes right back at him: “Yes, Lord” she says, “but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” Jesus loves that tenacity, loves it when people take him at his word. “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire” (Mt. 15:21ff).

God holds up people in the Bible who have nerve and pluck. I’m thinking of Bartimaeus, a blind beggar. When he hears Jesus is walking by, he cries out, “Jesus, have mercy on me!” Apparently, it isn’t the time or place for him to be shouting. It’s inappropriate and disruptive because immediately people yell at him, telling him to be quiet. But all that does is make him turn up the volume all the more. “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Jesus says to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” Jesus liked his persistence.

I don’t recall Jesus ever admiring a man or woman of great *innate* talents. We never see him heaping praise on a child prodigy, or a learned academic, or a highly acclaimed musician. Apparently, he’s not much impressed. He *is* the one, after all, who created them and endowed them with gifts and talents and interests.

He *is* impressed, however, by people who don’t easily give up. In fact, he so likes tenacious faith that he even tells a story about it (Luke 18:1ff).

It’s a about a widow who wants justice from a judge. But there’s a problem. The judge assigned to hear her case doesn’t care about justice. He doesn’t fear God or care about men. And as a widow in the first century she would be the easiest person to ignore. She has no influence or affluence, no leverage. But she has time, and determination, and a long-term goal. And so, she starts making the daily trip to demand justice from this judge. It’s the opposite of social distancing. She invades his spare time and again and is turned down time and again. But that doesn’t thwart her. She figures she’ll pester him until she gets what she wants. Of course, that’s how it turns out. **He’s** the one who relents. **He’s** the one who caves in under her pressure. And the point is, if this old coot who neither fears God nor cares about men, gives this widow what she asks for, how much more so will the Lord our God, (who is just and loving) how much more so will he see to it that your prayers are answered.

But there’s another side to this parable. I think Jesus is also saying, “Sometimes it’s going to seem to you that I’m like that old coot who doesn’t care about you or anyone else. Sometimes it’s going to seem like I don’t listen to your prayers and don’t answer them. But don’t you lose heart! Don’t you give up! You hang in there with faith and tenacity and patience. I have a plan for you, and a plan for others, and I’m working it in ways that are good and right and just. So, don’t you give up! Get angry. Get sad. Pound your fists into your pillow, but don’t turn your back on me.”

Think of those saints of old, your family members who are long gone, but whose faith inspires you still. My guess is what impressed you most about their faith was its tenacity and strength. Heb. 12:1 “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let **us also . . . run with endurance** the race that is set before us.”

We’re at the beginning of this thing, this pandemic. We have a long way to go. April is going to be a very hard month. What the world needs from us, from Christians, is not for us to join in the despair and

fatalism, but to be the lights that shine in the darkness. This is not the time to give up. God doesn't need that. He needs his people to be resolute, as he was resolute, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. He didn't say "It is finished" until it was indeed, finished. He persevered.

We need to follow his example and persevere and be persistent with our love for others as he was for us. "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt. 5:44).

We need to be tenacious about forgiving others as he was with us. How many times shall I forgive my brother? Up to seven times? "I tell you, not just seven times, but seventy-seven times!" (Mt. 18:22).

God needs us to be strong in the face of opposition. "Do not be overcome by the world but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21).

God wants us to be bearing all things in our marriages. "Go love your wife, Hosea, though she is beloved of another and is an adulteress, love her even as I the Lord your God love my people Israel, though they turn to other gods" (Hosea 3:1).

We need to persevere as parents. Impress [these commandments] on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." (Deut. 6:7).

And persistent in our worship: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). It wasn't a matter of convenience, or when they had nothing better to do. "They devoted themselves" to it.

Persistent in the study of God's Word. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Col. 3:16). Not just come for an occasional visit. Let it dwell within you. Marinate in it.

What the Lord needs from his people today is faith that is persistent

In prayer: "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess. 5:16-18).

Persistent in works of mercy. "Let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up" (2 Thess. 3:13).

Especially persistent in the faith. "Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have laid hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize of God's heavenly calling in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14).

What counts is not a flash in the pan sort of effort. What counts is our stick-to-itiveness over time.

And remember, never did a man have more tenacity and resolve than Jesus who suffered on the cross and paid the full price of your sins, and not a penny short. There's nothing left for you to pay.

And it's his strength and perseverance that counts the most, because there comes a time for each of us when we run out, when we have no more strength and tenacity or even will to live. There comes a day when we cannot bear yet another session of dialysis, or dose of chemo, or another surgery. There comes a day when we don't even have the strength to lift up our heads in order to take a pill.

When you've run clean out of strength, know this: The Lord our God is almighty. He is omnipotent. He has plenty of strength to spare, and he has plans for you to live a much better life in a much better place. Isaiah 40: "He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."

There are challenging days ahead, one suspects unlike anything we've ever seen before. What he wants from us is to be his faithful and persistent people. And then, when the shadows lengthen and the evening comes and the busy world is hushed and fever of life is over and our work is done, then we're going to need him even more, and he will **not** disappoint. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors *through him* who loved us. . . Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."