

**Series: Life!**

**Sermon: Persistence Pays**

**Luke 18:1-8**

Then Jesus used this story to teach his followers that they should always pray and never lose hope. 2 “In a certain town there was a judge who did not respect God or care about people. 3 In that same town there was a widow who kept coming to this judge, saying, ‘Give me my rights against my enemy.’ 4 For a while the judge refused to help her. But afterwards, he thought to himself, ‘Even though I don’t respect God or care about people, 5 I will see that she gets her rights. Otherwise she will continue to bother me until I am worn out.’”

6 The Lord said, “Listen to what the unfair judge said. 7 God will always give what is right to his people who cry to him night and day, and he will not be slow to answer them. 8 I tell you, God will help his people quickly. But when the Son of Man comes again, will he find those on earth who believe in him?”

**Sermon**

Johnny was a very bright five year old boy. He told his daddy he’d like to have a baby brother, and along with his request, offered to do whatever he could to help. His dad, paused for a moment and with a knowing gleam in his eye then replied, “I’ll tell you what, Johnny. If you pray every day for two months for a baby brother, I guarantee that God will give you one!” Johnny responded eagerly to his dad’s challenge and went to his bedroom early that night to start praying for a baby brother. He prayed every night for a whole month, but after that time, he began to get skeptical. He checked around the neighborhood and found out that what he thought was going to happen had never occurred in the history of the neighborhood. You just don’t pray for two months and then, whammo - a new baby brother. So, Johnny quit praying. After another month, Johnny’s mother went to the hospital. When Johnny went with dad to the hospital to see mom, they had a surprise for him. Mom was laying in the bed with a blanket. His dad pulled back the blanket and there was - not one baby brother, but two! His mother had twins! Johnny’s dad looked down at him and said, “Now aren’t you glad you prayed?” Johnny hesitated a little and then looked up at his dad and said, “Yes, but aren’t you glad I quit when I did?”

Talk about the power of prayer, Johnny’s dad got a taste of his own medicine, thinking that he was the clever one. Sometimes we are surprised by God in amazing ways. Our scripture this morning is also a bit surprising, because the hero of the story is a bit of a slime ball character. Jesus told the story to his disciples. It was a parable. A parable is a short story intended to give a lesson. Parable comes from Latin, meaning “comparison, to throw beside”. Jesus spoke in parables by giving short vignettes that was similar to the point he wanted to make, and he let his disciples or audience figure out the message. This parable highlights an unfair judge. In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God nor had any respect for people. This was a bad judge. He did whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted, without proper respect for the law. Also in the city was a widow who kept coming to the judge with the same request. “Grant me justice.” Time and time again, the widow kept coming to the judge. We don’t know her plight or her problem, but that isn’t important to the story. Finally, the judge had had enough. “Because this woman keeps bothering me, even though I don’t care about her or anybody, I will grant what she wishes just to get her off my back!” <paraphrased, of course>. Parents, we do this all the time. Going through the store. “Can I have this toy?”, “No.” “Can I have this toy?”, “no.” “Can I have this toy?”, “no”. “Can I have this toy?”, “For the love of all things that are sacred and holy, no.” “Can I have this toy?”.....”YES, Yes, Just shut up already!”. And what do we teach our children? Persistence pays. You can wear them down enough to get what you want. It comes back to haunt us later, doesn’t it? If they

know that they can get whatever they want with enough persistence, then every battle is up for grabs. After the story, Jesus gives a little tag line about how God will grant justice to his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night. If the unjust does what is right - even if out of selfish motives, how much more will God bless us! God, who gives out of the correct motives!

Usually, the preacher has a sermon about why we should give back to God. Why WE give to God. But this morning, let me flip it around and ask the reverse question. Why should God give to us? Because we are persistent? Because we whine or whimper? What is the motivation of God to give? He doesn't give because he thinks he has to. He doesn't give because he thinks it's the right thing to do. He doesn't give out of a sense of obligation or duty. So why does he give to us? I think there are three really good reasons, there are probably more, but three that stand out to me as significant.

First, God gives to us because if something is important to us, than it is important to Him. As a loving parent, God does not have the desire to see his children go without needlessly. What kind of parent wouldn't love and support their children when they needed them? The Bible puts it this way: "Which of your fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you re evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him." We have a God who wants to give, who wants to provide. God gives to us all of the time. God wants nothing more than to see us succeed and grow and flourish. The very first thing that He said to Adam and Eve in the garden was "Be fruitful". Take what I have given you and enjoy it! We have a God who gives. Our concerns are God's concerns. Our celebrations are also God's celebrations. When we laugh, God smiles. When we cry, God shares in our sorrow. If it is important to us, it is important to him. Now, there are some significant deviations from this Godly attribute. Sometimes, if we think that God really cares about us, he would remove some of the obstacles that we face. If God really gave a hoot about our needs, then He would provide them without much effort on our behalf. He would fix our ailing bodies or tell the hurricanes, enough already. If God loved us, he would fix these things for us. And that is something that God cannot do. I know miracles happen, but I cannot promise you when and where they will take place. God, this is important to me. Why doesn't it seem like you're listening? As a parent, sometimes it seems better for you to step aside and let things happen. I've talked to parents as they watched their children go through bankruptcy. It's painful to watch, but if the parents stepped in and tried to fix it for them, the children wouldn't have learned what put them there to begin with - and they would learn that the parents would bail them out time and time again without addressing the cause of their problems. I've seen parents watch their children struggle in school. And the parents step in, blame the teacher, principal, school board and raise Cain until they get their way, and the child is still not better off and has actually discovered that it doesn't matter if they learn or not, it will be taken care of for them. You can go through countless examples of times when parents have overstepped their bounds. And I'm sure that Steph and I have done the same, because we care about our kids. But sometimes a parents job is to do nothing. And it is during those times, it is crucial to understand that although the parent doesn't intercede, that the parent still loves and cares deeply for that child. Even if it looks like God is ambivalent to our suffering, please know that God loves and cares for you more than you will ever know, and that He will give you strength and courage to face whatever the future holds. God gives to us because what is important to us, is important to Him.

The second reason He gives to us is to show that all good gifts come from Him. Like most of us when we give gifts, we appreciate the fact that the gift is appreciated. Have you ever given a gift and not receive a thank you or even acknowledgment? Don't you find that frustrating? Where they have taken the gift for granted? It's as if they earned the gift, or it was just expected. I was talking to a grandmother the other day who was lamenting the fact that she gave her grandson a card and check every year for his birthday. And she wouldn't receive a thank you card or a phone call or anything. And every year, when she stops to write the check, she pauses and thinks, "Why am I doing this? What thanks do I get?" And yet, every year she gives. Not because she desires

credit, but because she truly cares about us. I think the same of God. God appreciates it when we do give thanks. But if we don't, He doesn't withhold his love. Sometimes we think we have earned the blessings that we have received. We deserve this, we deserve that. But in the end, all of our blessings are from the gracious gift of our Father in heaven. And nothing would warm his heart more than a heartfelt thank-you. God gives because he desires our humility and thankfulness.

The last reason that I have for why God gives to us the way He does is because he hasn't given up on us yet. He still has hope that we can become the people He created us to be. That's the story of Noah, isn't it? God gave up on the world and sought to destroy it? But Noah provided him hope that people can't be all bad. And Noah was saved as the rest of the world was swallowed up in chaos. And a rainbow came in the sky afterwards to show all of humanity that God wouldn't pull a stunt like that again. God continues to give because he believes in us, even when we have forsaken him. If God had given up on us, we wouldn't be here today. Think about all of the things that you have given up on. Sometimes we give up on dreams and aspirations. Sometimes we give up on people and throw our hands up in the air and say, "It's not worth it." Sometimes we give up on ourselves, thinking that we have blown it too far to be redeemed. Sometimes we wonder why does God bother with humanity anymore? He hasn't given up hope. None of us can move far enough away that God can't bring us back. When I look at people and I want to give up hope on them, I have to remember that Christ died for them. God won't abandon anybody, therefore, I can't abandon anybody. God gives because He still believes in us. Maybe for God, persistence pays.

One of the neat things about persistence is that we keep actively pursuing our future. The widow in the scripture could have easily given up her quest and quit. But she didn't. She knew what she wanted out of her future and she went for it with gusto that outlasted the unjust judge. By continually praying and asking and searching for God, we are also taking a vested interest in what our future holds. God knows what we need, but he wants us to come to him in prayer anyhow. Prayer is a powerful thing. Our prayers do matter! They are not just exercises in faith. The saying is true, "I don't know what the future holds, but I do know who holds the future." God does hold the future. If we don't pray, we forfeit our right to influence the future and to agree with God on what our future will be. He eagerly awaits hearing from you. Our God is a giver and he wants to give to us. May we be thankful and humble in our receiving from a God who gives. And it is His persistence in loving us that brings us closer to Him. Thanks be to God.

#### Opening:

Good morning Oregon City UMC and guests. Thank you for joining us today in worship! We are down here in Canby, this morning, just south of Oregon City, where we have a ferry that takes us across the Willamette. This ferry has been in service since 1914, with a small break from 46-53 after the war. The vessel currently used, the M.J. Lee II, is named after Millard Jerome Lee, the first child born in Canby. Lee was born in 1872, two years after the town was platted in 1870. This ferry services 350-400 cars a day, over 100,000 plus in a year. How does it get across the river? It uses electricity from power lines above, but is guided by an underwater cable. If that cable wasn't there, this boat would just float on down the river, not reaching the point it was destined to make. I can't see the cable, but it's there. If you have a destination, what is your cable? How do you get there? In the life of faith, we have a destination. We can make it heaven, we can make it a life of love, a life of service, a life of discipleship in one of it's forms, but for us to reach where we aim, we are tied to a cable. For us, it's the life of Jesus that holds us in step so that we can safely reach the shore. You want to reach the other side? Trust in Jesus. He's the ferryman who can see you through rough waters. Here are this morning's announcements.

#### Children's time

I love fruit. What is your favorite fruit? One of our favorite fruits in our house is watermelon. But it's hard to find in the winter. Luckily, yesterday was the first day of spring so it should be ready! Let's take a look!

Oh no. It doesn't look that great yet. Let's try tasting it. Yeah, not that great! I don't understand. It looked good from the outside. Some people have tricks to know how to tell if a watermelon is good, some people knock on it, some shake it a little. I really have no idea how to check. Maybe this watermelon needed a little bit of time to ripen up, to get a little sweet. And at some time in the future, this watermelon would have been ready. Sweet and good. But if you wait too long, then it just gets a little moldy and mushy and not good either. Galatians 6:9 says: Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. I like to think of that scripture as waiting for God's time. Sometimes, like waiting for this watermelon to sweeten up, we have to wait for God's time in His answers to prayer.

So don't give up. But remember that good things come to those who wait. Keep giving your prayers and hopes and dreams to God, and keep working for them, don't get weary - and see what happens. The watermelon, and God's blessings, are worth the wait!

Prayer:

Today's prayer is taken from St. Patrick's Breastplate. While probably written in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, it appeals and harkens the Spirit of Patrick centuries before. You are welcome to read with me.

Christ be with me, Christ within me,  
Christ behind me, Christ before me,  
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,  
Christ to comfort and restore me.

Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,  
Christ in hearts of all that love me,  
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

I bind unto myself the Name,  
The strong Name of the Trinity;  
By invocation of the same.  
The Three in One, and One in Three,

Of Whom all nature hath creation,  
Eternal Father, Spirit, Word:  
Praise to the Lord of my salvation,  
Salvation is of Christ the Lord.

Let us join the Lord's Prayer:

Offertory:

Welcome to the Offering, our chance to give back. As United Methodists, we support many ministries, within the church, outside the church, at home and abroad. One of our joys in ministry is celebrating our youth and their transitions in life. In a couple of months we will celebrate our seniors. We give them accolades, cards, love and support, and a monetary gift of some kind to celebrate their achievements. Generally, it is like a college bookstore gift card or other practical gift. We can do this, because we pool our gifts, tithes and offerings together to make ministry happen. You do not just support this church, but the church across the world. And support the church of the future as our graduates go near and dear, far and wide - taking what they received from OCUMC into their own futures. Thank you, Oregon City, for your gifts as we support our kids. As we sing Our offering hymn, check out some of our seniors of yesteryear!

Closing:

God bless you, Oregon City UMC and friends. Receive this Irish blessing:

May the road rise up to meet you.

May the wind be always at your back.

May the sun shine warm upon your face;

the rains fall soft upon your fields and until we meet again,

may God hold you in the palm of His hand.

And May we reach the other side safely! Spiritually and literally!