

Sermon for Proper 24C  
Sunday, October 16, 2022  
“Keep on keeping on”

Texts: Genesis 32:22-31; Luke 18:1-8

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Between today's Old Testament reading about Jacob wrestling with an angel and the gospel reading featuring the Parable of the Unjust Judge and the Persistent Widow, the message for today reminds me of that old saying: “Keep on keeping on.”

The lesson from Genesis is that wonderful story of Jacob wrestling with an angel. Jacob had a lot on his mind. He was a man whose life was a constant struggle. Esau was born first, but Jacob emerged from the womb linked to his brother's body, holding his heel. A man by birth, he lived in the women's tents and cooked, blurring traditional gender roles of his time. He was the second-born child, yet he acquired both his brother's birthright and his brother's blessing from his father Isaac, untraditionally giving him his father's inheritance. He dreamed of a conduit between heaven and earth (Jacob's Ladder), and stood beside the Maker of the Universe. He rose to success, but in a foreign land, not the land promised by God. Jacob had a lot of struggles and one night he wrestled with an angel that resulted in permanent injury to his hip, but he persisted in the struggle and received a blessing from the angel: his name was changed to Israel. He would become the father of twelve sons and a daughter, and those sons would later continue the legacy of the Hebrew people as the twelve tribes of Israel.

The Parable of the Unjust Judge and the Persistent Widow gives us the story of a heartless judge who “neither feared God nor had respect for people” and a widow who kept coming back to him asking for justice? The judge was supposed to be a defender of the law and an executor of justice, yet he was notorious for breaking both of the greatest commandments by not loving God and not loving his neighbor as himself. The widow would have been someone living in the margins of society without respect, without money, and without honor. We don't know what injustice her opponent was committing against her. Yet, she did not give up until something significant changed in her life.

The thing that we are supposed to learn from these two stories comes from the very first sentence of the gospel lesson: “Jesus told the disciples a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.” You know, I spent a lot of time in school when I was younger. Oh! How many times have I prayed! Every time a test came along, I prayed. Sometimes I did well; other times, I didn't do so well. In fact, I prayed my hardest when I thought I was going to fail the test. But, I didn't give up. I kept praying, asking God for what I wanted. I didn't always do great, but I persisted, and I graduated—with various honors. These lessons remind us that God expects us to be

persistent, to know that it's ok to be in that liminal space between asking God for what we want and trusting him to answer our prayer with what he knows we need.

Have you ever been at a point in your life when things just don't seem to let up on you? Those times when it seems that the whole world is crashing down upon you. As soon as one thing happens and you muster up the strength and emotion to deal with it, bam! Life hits you with another problem. Just when you think you're starting to gain a little bit of control, another wrinkle is thrown in the fabric of your life and you feel like everything is coming completely unraveled...and then it does. Jacob's whole life was that way; the widow in the parable probably felt like her life was spinning out of control and was full of despair, but they both kept on keeping on.

I'll never forget once talking to a woman following one of our Senior lunches I met a woman, one of the regulars who was walking out as I was leaving. She was a homeless woman who came to the Senior Lunch every month. And as we were walking out, she started telling me about the horrible week she had. She had spent most of the week wearing wet clothes from all the rain earlier in the week. She had so many other problems going on in her life that she couldn't even begin to tell me all of the things she had gone through. But as we parted ways, she said, "You know, Father, I have so many problems in my life. I don't know how I'm going to live from day to day, but at least I'm still here, and what keeps me going is believing that it will get better and everything's gonna be alright." That's the attitude that we ought to have: the will to keep on keeping on.

There isn't a time in history when we humans haven't faced problems—problems with the government, problems with society, problems with injustices, problems with violence, problems with health, problems with our emotions, problems with money, problems in our homes and families. Even when we are in a good place and everything seems to be going our way, something comes along to knock us off our feet. That's just the way life is; we're never in a place of absolute perfection. But the message of Jacob's wrestling with the angel and the Parable of the Unjust Judge and the Persistent Widow is that we must never stop praying and we must never give up. We must not stop calling on God to help us climb over the mountains in our lives.

Jesus also makes another important point at the end of the gospel text when he asks the rhetorical question if God will delay long in helping us. Jesus takes us beyond the here and now to a place that transcends time itself. How many times have you prayed, and prayed, and prayed until you had no praying left in you? Have you ever been in a place where you thought God was not listening? Have you ever felt like God had abandoned you? The thing we have to remember is that God's time is different from our time. What seems like a lifetime to us is but a blip to the One who is timeless. Even when it seems like God is not answering our prayers, we must never give up

praying, because he does hear our cries and he helps us. We must always lift up our eyes unto the hills from whence cometh our help. God's answer may not be in the form that we expected, and we may remain in our struggle for longer than we'd like, but as such, we continue to grow, and learn, and gain strength. The devil wants us to fail; the devil wants us to feel defeated, but God hears our prayers and he gives us the strength to keep on keeping on. "He may not come when you want him, but God is always right on time." So, while we wait patiently in the meanwhile, we can keep asking God for what we want and trusting him to give us what we need. Pester God—he can take it. Keep believing that it will get better and in the end and keep on keeping on. Amen.

#### Resource

Keith Throop, "Parable of the Persistent Widow," <https://reformedbaptistblog.com/2014/07/17/parable-of-the-persistent-widow-luke-181-8-teaching-outline/>

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-29-3/commentary-on-genesis-3222-31-10>