Persistence

Preached by Matthew Weber, lay preacher.
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Proper 24

Oh, what a beautiful day.
Thank you Lord for this beautiful day.
Lord, what can I do to repay
You for this beautiful day. AMEN

PERSISTENCE

Before I begin, I suppose I should issue some sort of “Spoiler Alert.” My wife Wendy read this sermon and complained that it was just too subtle. But since each of you has been handed a thick envelope, you may have guessed that today is, after all, the beginning of the World Famous St. James’ Stewardship Season,

And you probably already know that in almost every sermon, there is an element of stewardship, either stated or implied. “But,” she complained, “you never mentioned the word ‘Stewardship.’” Well, now I have.

PERSISTENCE

Today’s Lesson from Genesis is from that racy, soap operatic, part of the Bible. It tells the story of Jacob, who is a very strong man, but no saint. He is, in fact, a con artist. He has conned his brother Esau out of his birthright and his blessing. He has conned his mother, his father, his uncle, and his cousins [who became his wives.] He is returning home after a 20-year absence. But he is not sure if his brother Esau will welcome him home or murder him.

On the day before he is to meet Esau, Jacob wrestles, physically and metaphysically, with God. Olympic wrestlers wrestle for 3 periods of 2 minutes each. But Jacob and God persist all night long. Jacob persists, and eventually Jacob receives from God a blessing, a transformation, a new name, and reconciliation with Esau.

In the Epistle, Paul urges Timothy to “proclaim the message” and “Be persistent, whether the time is favorable or unfavorable”

In the Gospel, Jesus tells the story of the widow, who is denied justice by the corrupt judge. But she persists, repeating her plea over and over and over until the Judge finally relents. “And so,” Jesus concludes, “will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night?”

Remember Persistence.

In the middle of all this hard-hitting persistence, comes one of the most beautiful of the psalms. The Psalmist declares,

“I will lift my eyes to the hills.
From where is my help to come?
My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.”

The Democrats didn’t make heaven and earth;
the Republicans didn’t make heaven and earth;
the LORD made heaven and earth!
The Psalm continues: “The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; it is he who shall make you safe. The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in, from this time forth and for evermore.”

Not “the Republicans will keep you safe;”
Not “the Democrats will keep you safe;”
THE LORD will keep you safe”

The Lord made heaven, and earth, and everything. The Lord owns heaven, and earth, and everything. The Lord gave to us all that we have and we should be grateful.

What can we do to THANK the Lord?

The answer lies in the first chapter of the Epistle of James. You know, the passage. It’s part of the lectionary cycle. It starts,

“Every generous act of giving, With every perfect gift, Is from above...”

It continues,” ...But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers...”

And it ends, “…Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: To care for the orphans and widows in their distress...”

and so on. In other words, we should contribute a portion of all that God has given us, toward helping to make this Earth more like Heaven.

Contributing always poses a problem. Although I have found that the more I recognize just how much I have been given, the less painful that “giving back” part becomes. If this is a problem for you, I urge you to start by considering all that you have been given. Wrestle with it, if you must, just as Jacob wrestled with God and the widow wrestled with the Judge. And you must persist in prayerful consideration, with all the persistence of Jacob or all the persistence of the widow.

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Patricia tells me that I started using that prayer in 2010. It requires 3 giant steps that we must wrestle with: First, we acknowledge the beauty around us, be it sunrise, flowers, people, or relationships; Second, we acknowledge that that beauty is a Gift from God; Third, we acknowledge we should thank God for all we have been given.

Pull your yellow slips out of your programs and try it:

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Take the prayer home. Pray it at the beginning of each new day.

Struggle and pray and persist until God gives you the answer. AMEN

Genesis 27:1-33:18
2Timothy 3:14-4:5
Luke 18:1-8
Psalm 121
James 1:17-26