

19 Pentecost Celtic Luke 18:1-8
Christ and Grace October 20, 2019
Robin Teasley

Persistence. The dictionary says that persistence is perseverance in spite of fatigue or frustration, obstacles or discouragement. It is tenacity and endurance.

Persistence is a mosquito in your bedroom on a warm summer night. It's the musician who practices a difficult measure of music over and over until it is perfect. It's the basketball player who shoots from the free throw line hundreds of times until she can make the shot in her sleep. It's the four year old who will ask why an infinite number of times until finally she understands why. Persistence is a little stream of water that patiently wears down huge rocks over time.

Jesus tells his disciples a parable about being persistent in prayer as they are approaching Jerusalem for his trial and crucifixion. He knows that they will need this skill; that they will need to be in constant conversation with God to get through the most horrendous week of their lives. He knows that if they will be persistent in prayer, they will not lose heart.

It all comes down to prayer and patience as a way of life. This is not prayer in the sense that we see God as a heavenly vending machine, where we pray and then pull the lever to receive our heart's desire. No. Prayer is where we go to connect with God, to pour out our hearts and then allow God to refill them.

Our prayer life sustains us even in the worst of times, and it keeps us close to God. Author Barbara Brown Taylor explains how prayer works. "You are going to trust the process, regardless of what comes of it, because the process itself gives you life. The process keeps you engaged with what matters most to you, so you do not lose heart. This parable is about God and about Jesus returning to find people who have held fast, through everything, and have persevered in trusting God. Rather than thinking it's a matter of getting or not getting what we ask for, prayer keeps our hearts chasing after God's heart. It's how we bother God, and it's how God bothers us back."¹

As we pray we develop persistence. We are given the strength to persevere in doing the next right thing in each moment, whether it's getting out of bed in the morning or standing up for justice in the world. Prayer opens us to God's transformation in and around us, even when the answers are not immediate.

Poet Rainer Maria Rilke suggests that we be patient toward all that is unresolved in our hearts and to try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer."²

¹ Barbara Brown Taylor, "Bothering God," in *Home by Another Way*

² Rainer Maria Rilke, from *Letters to a Young Poet*

Being persistent in prayer gives us the time and space to ask our questions, to tell God those unresolved things in our hearts, and to expect that in God's time transformation and justice will come to us all.