

### Pastor Roy's Sermon from October 16, 2016 (Heritage Day)

This is not a parable about God. It's a parable about persistence. Luke steers it in the direction of faith, but it appears that Jesus originally used it to challenge people to be persistent. Don't give up. If something is important, keep at it. Persistence will win the day. And if we pursue *faith* persistently, relentlessly, we will see God even as Jacob did. How do we live our faith? How do we pray and not lose heart? Trust? Hope? Do we have the nerve to refuse to give up? To live faithfully? To live our lives from a faith center?

At times we are tempted to give up our most treasured dreams and values. We reconsider, How important is this vision or goal? Sometimes we need to let go of the things about which we are most persistent. We have to ask, "Why am I persisting?"

Then we must pray and not lose heart. In our prayer, we ask, "Are God and God's people calling me to this or am I clinging to something that is harmful to myself or others?" Life is fragile and brief. We must choose our causes carefully. Perseverance follows such choices and periodic reconsidering. We must listen to the voices around us. My personal opinion fades in comparison with the prayerful voices of friends and neighbors. We are in this together and our discernment is a group process.

This week we celebrated in Dillsburg our past and our present. Today we consider and celebrate the life of our congregations, especially remembering those who have gone before us. Most of the saints who have gone before us had no books written about them. No one but those close by took notice of their faithfulness. They were common folks who did common things with grace and mercy. They persevered in their faith, in their faithfulness, in their love, in their way of life. They all fell short of their own expectations. They all likely learned and grew more from their failures than their successes, just like us. Mistakes, errors, failures taught them humility and to see mutual need. After all a caring community is not a gathering of strong independent people who have no problems, but of folks who see their need to belong and share and relate to one another with humility and courage.

They persevered, like Jacob, in prayer. They wrestled with God, they wrestled with their neighbors to make it all work out for good, for mercy. Is not prayer about learning humility—about learning and embracing our place in this world? Clearly, in prayer we learn perseverance. We are driven to pray. What drives you to pray?

Prayer is not about getting things. . .but learning to give the very things we fear letting go. Even when we find ourselves demanding of God with clenched teeth and fists, we are learning to release our grasp as we pray. Sometimes even as we express our persistence, as in "Hey! I am not giving this up!" Now help me!" . . .If we are truly praying the fist will slowly open into an outstretched palm—ready to receive fresh vision, fresh help, fresh joy.

And yet if we are not honest about our demands toward God and ourselves, we are not praying, we are merely reacting to everything around us that does not fit into our plan. We are merely protecting what is near and dear to our fearful hearts. Ultimately, a life without life or quiet meditation will result in disappointment and frustration. Our points of persistence will lead us to despair.

So. . .let us pray. Let us confess our weakness and grow in humility. Let us commune together. . .with our Lord and one another as we see our mutual need and serve one another with gratitude and brotherly/sisterly affection. Keep praying, keep loving, keep remembering, keep coming back to the mercy of God which will never disappoint us but will always lead us into hope and salvation. Let us listen carefully, lest we lose our way. Then, and only then, let us persist in faith and not lose heart. Amen.