

Monica Cameron, Ordinand at Westcott House Theological College

Gen 32.22-31

Ps 121

2 Tim.3.14-4.5

Luke 18.108

Title: Persistence in prayer

Theme: Sometimes we feel praying is a demanding task that takes precious time out of our day, I wonder if we can begin to see prayer as the mainstay that helps us through each day?

Aim: to remind us that Jesus taught us how to pray and here he reminds us that persistence in prayer will bring just rewards.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight O Lord our strength and our redeemer.

As a child in primary school I remember a rhyme that we had to learn and be able to recite dailyit went like this;

Good better best never let it rest until your good be better and your better best.

At the time I thought nothing of it it was just a lovely thing to skip along to in the playground with my friends

It was years later I came to realise that its purpose was to instill in us an attitude of perseverance and persistence.

Rather like the common saying...if at first you don't succeed try and try again.

In theory all very well; but the reality is sometimes it becomes very difficult to keep trying, to have another go at whatever it is we are trying to achieve

I keep praying for peace in the world and it seems all to no avail why keep on praying?

I would like to share with you a story I recently came across and it is a story about a donkey that fell into a deep well, bear with me if you have already heard it; it goes like this.....

Once upon a time, there was a donkey.

It was a stupid, stubborn old donkey and even the farmer who owned it didn't like him.

The farmer owned a large property and one day he heard in the distance the loud, distinctive "eye-ore, eye-ore" of the donkey. He wondered what the stupid donkey had done now, so he looked all over his property until at last he found the animal at the bottom of an old abandoned well.

Exasperated, the farmer rang his neighbours and asked them each to bring a shovel. He'd had enough of the stupid donkey, so he had decided to bury it in the well.

All of his friends came over and together they started to shovel dirt into the well. At first, the donkey protested loudly, braying with all of his might, but after about 10 minutes, he stopped.

The farmers kept shovelling.

After a while, someone decided to have a look into the well to see what had happened to the donkey. What he saw astonished him. Instead of being buried, the donkey would dodge the incoming dirt, standing on the ever-increasing mound.

Now the mission changed and the farmers went from trying to bury the donkey to trying to save him, shovelling more and more dirt into the abandoned well until he jumped out of the top victorious.

Upon his release, the farmers all dropped their shovels and applauded the old donkey with a newfound admiration.

Why tell this story?

Well I think there are times when we might feel that a situation is hopeless; that however much we pray nothing seems to change.

We are surrounded by situations that seem to be very unjust someone we know to be God loving and God fearing becomes very ill.

We pray and the situation doesn't appear to get any better as far as we can see. I think in situations like this we need to hold on to the knowledge that Gods ways are not our ways

The farmer in the story could see no other way out than to bury the donkey but the donkey saw the situation differently

The donkey in the end triumphed; found a way to rise up out of the darkness of the well

Persistence in prayer helps to raise us up out of the darkness of unfairness and injustice that can seem to bury us at times.

The donkey did not give up!

In today's reading Jesus uses the parable of the widow and the unjust judge to teach his disciples that persistence pays off

Persistence in prayer will reap just reward

In this parable Jesus used the widow as a symbol to represent all who were in a state of desperation, those who were poor and defenseless, with no resource with which to persuade others to fight for them.

Her only weapon was persistence

Jesus said to the disciples an unjust judge, who feared neither God nor man was moved to respond to a widow's cry for vindication for one reason and one reason only and that was

To put an end to her pestering him probably day and night to vindicate her; we also remember that He told this story at a time when women had no right to seek such an action from any judge

But this unjust judge had to give in to the widow because she simply would not go away

So Jesus tells us if such an unjust judge could be moved to vindicate this widow how much more quickly will God who is righteous and just respond to our prayers.

A fellow Christian once asked me why we need to pray.

God knows our needs and will provide for us! Scripture tells us that! Well; undoubtedly there are many academic and complex answers to that question

But I think there is also a very simple answer and it is this...

God wants to be in a relationship with us just as we are in relationship with our friends and those around us!

When we feel completely powerless and all we can do is turn to God, it is in that handing over to God when we are able to receive God's gifts.

St. Augustine taught that asking God for things helps us to open our hearts to God's gifts for us so God can prepare them to receive these gifts;

I believe God wants to work **with** us and a good way to allow that to happen is through continuing prayer.

Our reading from Genesis tells us that Jacob wrestled with a man he later identifies as God. Jacob wrestled with this man, suffering an injury to his hip but refused to let go until the man blessed him.

Jacob identified the man to be God because after they wrestled the man said to Jacob... “You have striven with God and with humans and have prevailed”

Jacob in the end, received the blessing he wanted, he was no longer to be called Jacob but Israel and all his descendants would be blessed

Yes God knows our needs our hope our dreams and our desires but through persistence in prayer we build our relationship with God and He with us.

Jacob had no doubt that he wanted a blessing, he would not let go and in the end was able to say he had seen God face to face

The Widow had no doubt that if she kept on and on at the unjust judge he would eventually cave in.

The donkey in the story had no doubt that continually climbing on top of the dirt would result in victory and in his victory built a deeper and more meaningful relationship with the farmer

Our persistent prayers will be the foundation we shovel under our feet to raise up our families, friends, communities and ourselves to ever deep relationships with God. Amen.