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Never Give Up
Scripture reference: Luke 18:1-8

Pastor Diana Ziegler

Persistence. That's what the woman in today's scripture reading had - a whole lot of persistence... Now I have heard the word "persistence" defined in a variety of ways - some of them not so pleasant... Like "bull headed", or "obstinate", or "unrelenting" and none of those meant to be compliments! I have also heard the word persistent defined as "persevering", "firm", and "steadfast" which sound a bit more complimentary - almost as though you wouldn't mind being called "persistent"... Which was the woman in front of that judge? I think it depends who you ask...

The judge probably thinks she was obstinate and unrelenting; she probably thought she was being steadfast and firm. The judge probably thought she was a bull headed, tireless woman who was going to be the end of him; she probably thought she was persevering and she planned on being in this for the long haul... It's all about perspective.

1 Corinthians 16 says "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong" (1 Corinthians 16:13) Sounds to me like we are being asked to be persistent...

Why? Why would we need to be persistent in our faith? What can faith do for us? There are probably many different answers to that question that are rolling around in our minds right now... But Faith that justice will prevail really requires that we focus our faith in two specific areas: first, the person that God created you to be - which means faith in Him too. And second, the system in which we live - which also means faith in Him too...

How does this story of the woman and the judge speak to us about having faith, about being persistent in our faith that justice will prevail? For her, it was justice against an adversary, someone who had challenged her or was somehow against her. How did faith play a part in her receiving justice? She had faith in herself, in her ability to keep up the fight for justice, no matter how many times she got shot down. And she had faith in the system, that the system would have to provide justice because that's what the system was created to do. Now, whatever reason that judge had for supplying that justice, it was still justice. She persisted, she never gave up and justice won.

That works the same for us. We need to have faith in ourselves - that we can utilize all the gifts that God has given us, in turn having faith that He is there and is supporting our use of those gifts. "fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10) And we have to have faith in the system - that justice will prevail as God has ordained it will "For justice will prevail, and all the morally upright will be vindicated." (Psalm 94:15)- and faith is the key... When we have faith, it frees our minds to be open to explore new ideas, open to explore our own ingenuity, open to accepting our role in receiving the justice of our God...

And justice comes in different ways to different people. It might be justice against someone, or justice for someone. It might be justice for accomplishments, or even justice for working hard and never giving up... The Justice we need to see is that which God has spelled out for us in Scripture. Justice that brings wholeness, and makes things right. Justice is centered in God's heart, and with our own hearts transformed, we are to extend God's justice to the world, and to show no partiality. And we will receive Justice for our persistence in pursuit of this wholeness of this making things right... We will receive justice when our faith in the "system", our faith in our God remains strong and persistent no matter what difficulties we might face.

Be strong and courageous... for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you." (Deuteronomy 31:6)

There are countless stories of people in history whose faith is born out in their own inspirational stories. Stories that remind us to never give up...

Henry Ford - founder of the Ford Motor Company and a key factor in the development of the assembly line technique of mass production. Very few people have NOT heard of Henry Ford - an amazingly accomplished man who failed and went broke five times before he finally succeeded. That took faith, and a lot of persistence.

This is a baseball kind of town right? We have big time baseball right here in our own congregation don't we... Well, baseball fans, did you know that Babe Ruth, who is considered to be the greatest athlete of all time and is famous for setting the home run record, also holds the record for strikeouts? Talk about persistence...

Did you know that Elvis Presley was fired after only one performance at the Grand Ole Opry? Elvis was told, "You ain't goin' nowhere... son. You ought to go back to drivin' a truck." People were rude and down right mean to him when he first started out... Was Elvis an obstinate, bull headed young man or was he steadfast and persevering? Confident in the gifts God had given him, seeking justice that he might use those gifts.

And age does NOT play a role here. Colonel Sanders had the construction of a new road put him out of business in 1967. He went to over 1,000 places trying to sell his chicken recipe before he found a buyer interested in his 11 herbs and spices. Seven years later, at the age of 75, Colonel Sanders sold his fried chicken company for a finger-lickin' \$15 million! Faith and persistence to boot!

Persistence and faith isn't just about acquiring fortune or fame though - I don't want you to leave thinking that is what we all have to strive for. These men had talents, had gifts that they wanted to use to help people in some way or another. Persistence and faith aren't always about pushing other people's buttons either like the woman pushing the judges buttons, or Colonel Sanders pushing button after button to sell his recipe... Persistence and faith are also about just having faith and persistence and showing those traits in yourself as a gift both from and to God. Remember earlier I said that faith opens up ingenuity? Here is a perfect example of what I meant by that...

One day a farmer's donkey fell down into a well. The animal cried piteously for hours as the farmer tried to figure out what to do. Finally, he decided the animal was old and the well needed to be covered up anyway it just wasn't worth it to retrieve the donkey. He invited all his neighbors to come over and help him. They all grabbed a shovel and begin to shovel dirt into the well. At first, the donkey realized what was happening and cried horribly. Then, to everyone's amazement, he quieted down.

A few shovel loads later, the farmer finally looked down the well and was astonished at what he saw. With every shovel of dirt that fell on his back, the donkey was doing something amazing. He would shake it off and take a step up. As the farmer's neighbors continued to shovel dirt on top of the animal, he would shake it off and take another step up.

Pretty soon, everyone was amazed as the donkey stepped up over the edge of the well and trotted off!

Justice for the donkey who was ingenious enough to shake off the dirt that was thrown on him, and rise above; and Justice for the farmer who benefited from the Donkey's ingenuity and continued to work hard to see him come out of the well and fill the old well at the same time. And the moral of the story?

Life is going to shovel dirt on you, all kinds of dirt. The trick is to not to get bogged down by it. We can get out of the deepest wells if we Never Give Up! Shake it off and take a step up!

"I can do all this through him who gives me strength." Philippians 4:13

"Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong." 1 Corinthians 16:13

“...as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.” (2 Chronicles 15:7)

I like to think I am a pretty positive person, strong in my faith in God and in all he has given me; but every now and then I go through times where I feel like it's all just too hard; that it would be easier to just throw in the towel, just quit. It's at those times I like to look back at these stories I shared with you today and remind myself just how far people have come to reach success. How “Never Give Up” is a mantra - a worthy way of living as a child of God. I get inspired by these stories, inspired when I am reminded about how they overcame many failures and rejections. About how they persisted, and how they maintained faith in the gifts, in the abilities, in the grace that is given by God - and how their faith allowed them to Never Give Up,,,

There is all kinds of dirt that gets thrown on us; obstacles that can get in our way; it's what we do with that dirt, with those obstacles that determines who we become and how effective our lives can be in helping others.

It is much better if we don't give up. If we have the persistence of the woman in front of the Judge and Babe Ruth, the ingenuity of the donkey and Henry Ford, the faith of Colonel Sanders and Elvis Presely.

Never give up!!! When bad things happen to good people... that's kind of just life Our lives are full of negative moments that can be overcome with a little persistence, a little faith...

Never give up believing in yourself - in the you that God created - on purpose! Never lose faith in yourself or the brains and talents that God has blessed you with, and always be persistent when looking for justice in your own or others' lives.

I leave you with this message from the gospel of Mark: When things seem overwhelming, almost impossible, and you are feeling disheartened by the dirt that has come down on you, remember these words of Jesus: “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.” (Mark 10:27) Never Give Up!!! AMEN