

## **Being Persistent ~ October 17, 2010**

**Jeremiah 31: 27-34; II Timothy 3:14-4:5; Luke 18:1-8; Psalm 121**

The other day, as I was peeling what seemed to be a ton of potatoes, I longed to stop and take a break. I knew, however, that if I did, I might not return to the task at hand. I needed to be a little persistent to get things done in a timely fashion.

I am sure most of us have had times when we need to give ourselves a little push to persist in doing something we might find difficult. I have noticed that many of us do overcome those little bumps of inertia and just keep on going and going and going like that little Energizer bunny.

Our readings for this morning are all about being persistent. In the first we read of God's persistence in dealing with us humans. Jeremiah quotes God as saying, in effect, "Well you know, I have tried writing the rules and regulations I would like you to follow, to have successful live, on stone tablets but either you can't read or you won't. So, I think I will try a new way of establishing a covenant with you. I will write it on your hearts and it will always be with you. This way you can't shut my words and wishes for you away and ignore them."

I have always found this promise of a new covenant between God and his humans a wonderful story. It reminds me of an old Girl Scout song which sang, "When e'er you make a promise, consider well its importance, and when made, engrave it upon your heart." This promise speaks to us of forgiveness no matter where we might be or who we might be in life. It speaks of the love God has for each of us—a bond that will never be broken. It reminds us that if we look in our hearts we will find God—a persistent presence that never lets us go, that is always with us.

In the little Second Letter to Timothy, human persistence is highlighted. Paul instructs Timothy to be steadfast in teaching others what he knows of the way of Jesus. Paul well knew that there would be times of suffering, disenchantment and even disappointment in Timothy's ministry. He urged him to be persistent, never to give up even though people might develop "itching ears" and look for some new faith.

Sometimes, having "itching ears" is not a bad thing. It makes us search beyond what we know. Most often we make a circle back to what we believe makes the most sense to us in the arena of faith.

There is never anything wrong in exploring other approaches to God than the one that is right at hand. A wise old minister always told those in his congregation that, "There are many pathways to the mountaintop." There are. If we stop to examine the pathway we have chosen, we might find that we are eclectic in our approach having integrated little bits and pieces of other faith systems that enhance Christianity. It is almost impossible to live in our world of great diversity and not have other faiths bump into us and leave a little something sticking to us. A friend always tells me to "Take the meat and leave the bones." Our need is to be persistent in our search for God and the way that leads us into an abundant spiritual life.

Then, there is our parable from Luke about the unjust judge or the persistent widow. We are never told what the injustice is that the widow was suffering. We are not told this because it is not what is important in the story. Jesus was talking about the need to

be persistent in prayer. We need to keep coming back to God and “knock, knock, knocking on heaven’s door.” The thought is that we will wear God out and our wish will be granted, just as the widow managed to finally wear out the judge with her persistent visits.

I don’t think we can wear out God or God would have been worn out long ago. Very often, through persistent prayer, we begin to find an answer deep within ourselves. We begin to find a way that leads us to a solution to a problem, or an acceptance of what it is that might be going on. I often tell people that it takes a while for our minds to catch up to what it is that is going on in our lives. And, it does. We might have a problem or a tragedy that is beyond comprehension. But, with time, things begin to become clearer to us and all the pieces begin to fall into place. We can sit and logically reason through things to get to the place of peace, or we can offer up our torment to God and leave it in God’s hands.

It seems that the more persistent we are in doing this, the more peaceful our souls become and the more able we are to cope with whatever it is that befalls us. We all have had dark nights of the soul. Most often, if we are able to offer them up to God, we will gain a night’s sleep and a fresh outlook in the morning. I understand this, I have been there and done that, and, when I realize that the promises of God are written on my heart, I gain a measure of peace. This does not come all at once, it is, rather, a slow awakening to a resource that is present for all of us and that never abandons us. We only need to keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking and the door will be opened unto us. Maybe not tomorrow or the next day, but there will be an answer and a resolution to what it is that has been troubling us.

So, whether we are peeling a ton or potatoes, or searching for deeper spiritual meaning or an answer to a problem, we should remember that God is at the very heart of us giving us strength, direction and purpose. We need only realize that we can never wear out God with our prayers and questions. We only strengthen ourselves by knowing God is always within us.

Amen