

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Persistence"
Dr. J. Dent

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Much of what we do in our day to day lives, we do as a matter of routine. Routine simply means "customarily formed procedures and activities," in other words, the stuff you do without too much thought. So our routines we do, no matter how strange to others, as just who we are and what we do, whether working, retired, in school or in some other category.

And often the routine becomes difficult to continue, perhaps due to boredom, perhaps due to overfamiliarity, perhaps due to anxieties preventing us from doing other things. Then what? For many of us, we persist in doing what we always have been doing. If we put the radio on in the morning, we do this again and again, just because it is what we do, not necessarily because we determine each day to be well informed, nor if we simply like someone's voice. Persistence is what we do when we drive in our cars the same route over and over, even though there may be a faster one, or one that makes more sense due to construction or other obstacles. Yet we can go on "automatic pilot" and just go because that is where the car is headed.

Persistence is that part of us that carries on sometimes unconsciously, sometimes very consciously. Many of us can be quite persistent in obtaining our goals. We can be quite vocal, complaining, making noise to make sure our cause or some service we pay for is being given appropriate attention. We persist because we are inwardly motivated to get what we want.

The miners trapped in that nightmarish situation of being unable to make their way out without significant help reminds us of their persistence in not giving up hope. 33 Chilean miners 69 days 600 meters under the earth with only a small pipe to get them food and provisions. Yet they persevered.

They persisted and the world now rejoices in their being saved. Many have written on how often we hear about 33 or more people being killed in various accidents and weather incidents. But the world came together, routing for these miners, so far away, from us, from their own families. Yet they were saved.

We come Sunday by Sunday to church, some of us less, for the same narrative to come true in our own lives. For we too need help. We too are trapped in at least some areas of our lives. We too need extraordinary intervention and often don't even know how to ask for it.

Jesus uses that sense of not knowing, but also that sense of persistence to tell us a story about how to pray. I wish I could tell you more about prayer, but my resources are quite limited in that regard. I can tell you what I think Jesus is telling us all. Jesus told stories to make his points. In his day, like ours, they were many different kinds of judges. Some judges in their court systems were well known for their ethics and moral strength. But just like today, there were judges that didn't care at all about God, or accountability to God. These judges, some of them, don't even care about people and the community. They have the job, and the legal credentials for the job, but their character seems ill-suited to the end goal of sitting in the seat of judgment.

There was one particular judge Jesus had in mind, that may have been in the local papers of his day, if such had existed. He may have been a fictional person. In any case, he had no respect for God and certainly none for people. He just didn't care. He may have cared about the rule of law, but not the purpose of that rule and order. A widow, who had little or no social standing, kept coming to him for justice. She would not give up. She persisted in presenting her case. Some would say she nagged and whined. That is a matter of perspective. What Jesus said she did, is what we need to do in our prayer lives. Now we all have a prayer life, whether just at meals, or a quick "Help me, God" prayer in times of trouble. We all have prayer lives.

Jesus says our prayer lives should be marked with the kind of persistence that the widow brought to the unjust judge. She kept before him the greatest concern(s) of her heart. So should we do the same with God.

In fact Jesus says this is the only we to keep on praying and not lose heart. Because it is easy to lose hope. As the sign says on the way to Hell, "Abandon hope all you who enter here." It is easy to despair in this broken world, sinful people, rebellious selfishness and difficulties often beyond what we think we can stand.

Yet God calls us to keep bringing to Him whatever is foremost in our minds, so that we might give the burden of it over to Him, and receive the peace that He has for us, as we follow His ways. God calls us to not only know what is important to us, God also encourages us to give up lying to ourselves.

Sometimes self-deception can be profound. This is certainly true for those of us received messages of rejection, abandonment, abuse and everything but love as children. Then we have tapes running inside of us that tell us we are worthless, useless, and unimportant in countless ways. This in turn often leads to resentments, bitterness, and constant friction in relationships with little chance of receiving refreshing love and grace.

Sometimes our lying to ourselves is simply saying, "I don't care" when in fact you care very deeply. These irrational defenses come up at various times and we need to be more aware of when we are lying to ourselves and when we are not.

Self-knowledge to a deep enough place of knowing where we are lying and where we are not lying comes as we seek to be open to such information. We must first of all be open to God, and then open to other people. As I often say, we need other people to give us a sense of reality. We only have sense as others reflect on what they see and hear us saying and doing. Otherwise we only have our own warped perception of ourselves.

Such honesty goes a long way in prayer. Such honesty goes a long way to cultivating friendship and community. Such honesty is healing.

Yet it is a journey that begins today and goes for the rest of our lives. And many of us feel that we do not have any issues to work on. Again, if this is the case for you, please ask someone close to you about those areas of lying and/or challenges in your life which you cannot see yourself. Hopefully, we all have someone close to us who will tell us the truth. Otherwise, we are stuck in our routines, in our self-perceptions and what we always do.

Interesting enough, religion can become this as well. In fact, one of the meanings of the word "religiously" is that which we do over and over without thinking about it. I hope your coming here week by week gives you a chance to consider and re-consider what you believe, to come in line with the Scriptures and the Lord of the Bible.

This week and next week are officially the Bible Sunday Sundays which give us a chance to consider how important the Scriptures are to each of us individually.

For me, the Bible has changed my life and relationship to Jesus Christ has set me on a path that I never could have imagined. I believe it has been a path of service.

In the Scriptures, we find that the Lord often turns things around to surprising conclusions. While our culture yells over the loud speaker about how important it is to be powerful. Yet the Lord whispers to us that there is strength in weakness. There is beauty in sharing and asking for help.

We keep only that which we give away. And we are only as strong as the community which we say is **our** community.

Today we have reaffirmed this reality in the Picco family. We trust Spencer will choose for God, as he grows up. We don't know. But we do know the One who has given us all grace and hope to be here today.

Let us pray.