

Pentecost 22 – October 16, 2016
Text: Genesis 32:22-30
Theme: "Never Let Go of God!"

We have all heard that God expects us to be persistent in prayer but what does that really mean? There are people I have known over the years who are definitely persistent and sometimes they are so persistent that I finally just wear down and let them have what they want. I think of weddings as an example.

In my early years, I was very strict about what would be allowed in a wedding. A wedding was a service of worship, so nothing from secular society could be brought into weddings I performed. After 26 years of brides and mothers of the bride crying in my office, I just gave up, not because I thought they were right, but because I needed to spare my sanity and choose my battles. So now you don't mess with the stuff I do between the Invocation and Benediction but if you want the groom to wear a pink tutu and do handsprings down the aisle, I just don't care anymore. It's your wedding.

That is not the kind of persistence God is advocating. He is not suggesting that we need to whine loud enough and long enough to get what we want because we already know that God is never going to give us anything harmful to us no matter how much we may want it and that God already wants to give us everything that is good for us as soon as we are ready to receive it.

God gives us Jacob as an example. Jacob was camped out in the wilderness when Jesus Christ came to him as the Angel of the Lord. This is one of the few appearances we have of Jesus before taking on human flesh at the incarnation. We know that it is Jesus from Biblical recountings of the event, but Jacob himself said that he had wrestled with God.

But Jacob did more than wrestle. He held on to God. He demanded God's blessing and he would not let go of him until he got it. Can you imagine how bad it hurt to have your hip knocked out of socket? I have seen people with dislocated hips in so much pain they could not move and still Jacob would not let go of him until he got what he wanted. Finally God blessed him and changed his name from Jacob, which means "cheater," to Israel, which means "he strives with God." God rewarded Jacob for clinging to him and refusing to let go – that's the kind of persistence God is looking for.

You and I are constantly encouraged by the world around us to leave our faith behind. Faith is fine for Sundays and religious holidays, but we trust in scientists and politicians and financial advisers during the rest of the week. No. We grab ahold of God and drag him with us into every place we go. When Mr. High School Science teacher tells us that man evolved from a single celled

organism that crawled out of a mud puddle, we say no Mr. Science teacher. God created human beings in the Garden of Eden and while we may have evolved into taller or shorter, fairer or darker we have not evolved from an amoeba. Or when that weird uncle that most families have starts whipping up the fear in the family that has Isis marching down main street Lombard taking hostages, remind him that God is in control and whatever the political climate, whoever is the president, God will bless us with his presence and many opportunities to serve him. That is what it means to be persistent.

We never give in. We drag God into every conversation and every situation and proclaim him to be the solution to every crisis. That is our job and if we do our job, all is right with the world because we know God will do his job.

Jesus tells the parable of the persistent widow to remind us to be even more persistent with God than we are with secular authorities. That widow got what she wanted by never giving in. She is dealing with a secular judge who cares nothing for her personally. Imagine what we can accomplish by being persistent with a God who loves us and wants the very best for us! I am convinced that we have not because we ask not. Recently I heard some criticism that I'm always asking for something. We're behind

in our offerings, we need a roof repaired, we need to support missionaries, on and on I go. But you are the hands and the feet of Jesus! You are to be doing his work and paying for the work that you cannot do. You are to be here every week that you can be to see what needs to be done and to do whatever you can. Who else is responsible? This is God's Church but he is very clear that we are the vessels through whom he works his works.

God has called me to make disciples of all nations...not just my personal family...not just my congregation...not even just my community...but ALL NATIONS. He has called me to do this by baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them all the things he commanded. He has called me to do this but he called me to do this through you! And if you don't believe that, come by my office because I have a document signed by your representatives saying so. So since you are the ones who called me, guess who gets dragged into this with me? YOU! Every day I pray to God to empower us and enable us to do the work of making disciples of all nations. I am persistent with him and until the job is done or the last one of us drops dead, I will be just as persistent with you. I will not let go of him or of you until we receive all the blessings he has promised us, the last of which is eternal life together with him in paradise.