

TENACIOUS FAITH TRIUMPHS



Scripture:

Genesis 32:22-31

²²The same night he got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. ²⁴Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. ²⁵When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. ²⁶Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." ²⁷So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." ²⁸Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." ²⁹Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. ³⁰So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." ³¹The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip.

Today's passage comes up in the lectionary at a perfect time because it is about not losing heart when things in the world overwhelm us.

Despite the devastating hurricanes, the disappointments in our Presidential campaign, and with the atrocities happening in Syria, for example, we are to persistently and tenaciously pray, always with the expectation that God is at work in the world -- even if the answers to our prayers seem to come very slowly OR in a different way than we expected.

Listen now to Luke's description of a parable Jesus taught his disciples.

Luke 18:1-8

¹Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. ²He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. ³In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' ⁴For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God

and no respect for anyone, ⁵yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.” ⁶And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? ⁸I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



TENACIOUS FAITH TRIUMPHS

This message from Jesus is about praying and trusting that our loving God will grant justice and mercy even in what seems to be a hopeless situation. This selection from our lectionary comes up the week of Yom Kippur, the high Jewish holiday that is considered to be the most important holiday in the Jewish religion.

YOM KIPPUR

Yom Kippur is like rolling our whole season of Lent into one day of Atonement. Jewish people who do not normally observe any other Jewish custom often will choose this day to honor their faith by fasting, not working, and by attending the synagogue service. Yom Kippur, considered the highest of holy days, is first mentioned in the Old Testament in Leviticus 23. It is about trusting that God will grant justice. So they confess all their mistakes and failures, they fast in penitence, and they go to the synagogue to pray with the expectation that God forgives.

Did anyone hear National Public Radio’s interview of Rabbi Rick Jacobs about Yom Kippur last week? Jacobs is the president of the Union for Reform Judaism, which represents about nine-hundred Reform congregations in the United States. Out of the four-million people who identify themselves as Jewish in the United States, thirty-five per cent are of the Reform tradition which is the more progressive group.

During the NPR interview, Rabbi Jacobs said, “I think every rabbi, as he or she prepares their sermons for this Yom Kippur,

believes it is critical to address the disturbing issues happening around us.

“They will have to speak about the things that matter most to those sitting in the pews.... It is very important to not be politically partisan but to be strong and clear and moral.”

One part of the Old Testament that all Jews read on Yom Kippur is from the prophet Isaiah, who says,

**“Raise your voice like a shofar -
like a ram's horn.
And don't only think about
the fast from food.
Think about ending injustice,
sharing your bread
with the hungry,
letting the oppressed be free.”**

JUSTICE AND COMPASSION

Isaiah makes it clear that if you're not focused on the things that are at the core of society’s need for justice and compassion, you're not doing your job as a faithful believer.

Rabbi Jacobs added: It is important always to speak up and to speak out against bigotry, xenophobia (which is the fear of people from other countries), and misogyny (the disrespect of women). Jacobs said the rabbis all over our nation will affirm for people the things that really are at the heart of being a person of Jewish faith or of any faith.

Like the rabbis preached for Yom Kippur, we too must affirm the things that are at the heart of being a person of the

Christian faith. And this passage today highlights four of these things:

1. Praying to God without ceasing and trusting that God responds.
2. Faith and trust in Jesus who is the polar opposite of this disrespectful faithless judge.
3. Faith means not giving up or losing heart when all seems lost in chaos.
4. Jesus tells his disciples this lesson to emphasize the love of God for all and the compassion they are to show to people on the margins that the widow represents.

THE WIDOW

A widow in that culture was one of the most hopeless people alive. And the widow in this story who was addressing the judge alone must have lost not only her husband but her whole family's support. That means she would have also lost her social standing and must have been close to losing her life.

Jesus puts a widow in his parable to represent the people who were living on the edge of society, ignored, overlooked, with no power, no voice and no future. So she had to turn to someone with power who also did not care about her. But her persistent pleading broke through the judge's wall of indifference. Jesus is reminding the disciples how God is the opposite of the indifferent judge. Our God generously pours upon us compassion, love, and care, so we should expect more of the same when we persistently pray with faith and trust.

Bishop Larry Goodpaster (his real name!) the good Methodist bishop wrote about the persistent tenacious actions of this widow in an essay called "Unleashing the Power of Prayer." He said he was impressed by, "her confidence that eventually the judge would respond." And he describes the "image of the widow standing with head and arms lifted up as a sign of being ready to receive what it is that God will pour down upon her."

So let's do that if we can while sitting. Look up and raise your arms as you would

on a rainy day welcoming the rain coming out of the sky. Think of the raindrops flowing down as little reflections of God responding to our prayers.

Research shows that if you use this pose of gratitude, it is a power pose that enhances your day. According to Amy Cuddy, a social psychologist at Harvard Business School, everyone should spend two minutes power posing. These stances are like the victory pose, associated with confidence, power and achievement — chest lifted, head held high, arms up, is one of the poses she recommends doing daily. Your body language changes your psychological state. When you feel powerless and stressed you fold in and collapse onto yourself. When you want to have a successful day, you should start out with three "p's": a positive pose and prayer.

Bishop Larry reminds us in his essay that prayer is not about bringing just a to do list to God. He says, "Prayer is about positioning ourselves to receive what God offers, confident that God will act."

Then he quotes Kathleen Norris, who said in her book *Amazing Grace*,

"...Prayer is not asking for what you think you want but asking to be changed in ways you cannot imagine, to be made more grateful, more able to see the good in what you have been given instead of always grieving for what might have been."

TENACIOUS PRAYER

Dr. Valerie Carter in this video clip is an amazing example of tenacious prayer leading to triumph over adversity. Now Dr. Carter is the Executive Director of the Missionary Union of Virginia that helps many people including widows in India. But she attributes her success to persistent

prayer. In desperation at the age of nine she ran for safety into a church alone because her parents were drug addicted and her home had become dangerously dysfunctional. Let's listen to Dr. Carter's testimony about how she credits prayer for literally saving her life. The following video was show to the congregation. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3U-t26ckzVc>

THE POWER OF LOVE AND COMPASSION

The power of love and compassion that God shows us with justice and mercy ultimately triumphs over indifference, disrespect and faithlessness. Prayer is an act of trust that helps us cope with a world filled with fear, prejudice, hatred, self-centered greed, and violence. We may not get our list of prayer requests answered in the way we ask them, but praying is listening to God and receiving what our generous compassionate God has to give.

You can be the generous answer to someone's prayer and help to restore someone's faith in our almighty creator and source of compassion and love. So as we stand now and sing, let the words of this hymn be a prayer to God for help on behalf of our sisters and brothers in Haiti who are trying their best to not lose heart in the midst of adversity. Amen

Benediction:

Be tenacious and persistent with your communications with God; don't give up hope no matter how dire the circumstances. Your relationship with God will deepen and that is a victory in itself!

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



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