



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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October 28, 2007

22nd Sunday after Pentecost

2 Timothy 1:3-14

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Genesis 32:22-30

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 121

Second Lesson: 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Gospel: Luke 18:1-8a

Guard the Good Deposit

The theme of worship tonight deals with persistence. You've seen persistence, haven't you? The persistence of that widow that we read about in the gospel, in Jesus' parable; you've probably seen that some time in your life, haven't you, as you have been checking out at the grocery store. When some little kid is annoyingly persistent, pleading and begging and screaming and hollering at Mom to buy them something in the checkout line; have you ever seen Mom or Dad give in to that kind of persistence just like the judge we just read about?

In the First Lesson there was persistence that, I have to admit, I've never seen anyone wrestle with God all night long and then persist in demanding a blessing from God before God would let them go. That one I've never seen, but I can see the persistence in that lesson that we read.

Did you notice the Second Lesson, the series of readings we have been having from 2 Timothy, did you notice how it really fit the theme of persistence? It really does, but notice who is being persistent—the Holy Spirit talking through Paul, Paul giving his advice to Timothy. He says to Timothy and to you and me today, "Continue in what you have learned." Isn't God being persistent in telling us, "Don't think you know it all. What you have become convinced of by the Holy Spirit, continue in it. Don't just say, 'I know that. I don't need to study it anymore.' Continue in it." God is being persistent. God is telling us how important it is for us to get to know him better. We are on the receiving end of God's persistence in the Second Lesson. That is an interesting thought, isn't it?

Of course God has to be persistent with us, doesn't he? As sinners, at times we have kind of a thick skull and know better than the good Lord. He has to tell us some of the same things over and over and over. If he wasn't persistent, just think of where we would be. His persistence is a blessing to us. He says to us, "Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of—first of all because you know where you have learned it from and you know how trustworthy that is; secondly because you know how important it is for you." That is exactly what God says to us, and it is the same thing that Paul was saying to Timothy.

We've talked about Paul and Timothy and their relationship as mentor/pupil, aged missionary/pastor, young pastor/young shepherd. Paul is getting close to being poured out like that drink offering as he talks about in this letter, so he writes with the plea of a dying man, the urgency of a dying man telling some important things to someone he cares deeply about. He had just talked about how in the last days it is going to be

Godlessness. “It’s going to be Godlessness, and it’s not going to be pretty. It’s not going to be fun. There are going to be all kinds of things that will attack you, Timothy, because you are a minister of the gospel.” From Timothy’s day until now, it hasn’t gotten any better.

What Paul had said, and if you read the chapter before what we read, it’s an ugly, ugly picture that would put a little shake into your knees if he was talking to you directly. It ought to put a little shake into our knees because he is talking to us directly.

Then he comes back after the knees are a little wobbly and the stomach is tightened and the mouth is dry and the palms are sweating and says, “But as for you, don’t let it worry you. Don’t let it overcome you. Continue in what you have known and have become convinced of.” You know who you learned it from and you know how their faith has sustained them is in essence what he is saying—Eunice and Lois, his mom and grandma. Paul had talked about them earlier in the letter. But he also says, “Continue in what you have learned because you know what they were teaching you. They were teaching you the Holy Scriptures. The Holy Scriptures weren’t their idea. It wasn’t their words. It’s not just as reliable as they are. All Scripture is God breathed. God put the thoughts, the words, and the ideas into the people who wrote the Scriptures.” When Paul is talking about it he is talking about the Old Testament, but it is just as applicable for the New Testament.

It’s the same thing that Peter said. The prophecy never had its origin in the will of men, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. You can rely on the Word to sustain you as you go through things getting worse and worse and more and more challenging and as people attack you and try to undermine you because you know what it is. You know who is talking to you. This is the Good Lord whispering in your ear to strengthen you. This isn’t mom or grandma. This isn’t some earthly teaching. This is God himself—the One who brought the universe into being by his almighty word. This is what he saw fit to talk to you about because he knew this is what would sustain you. That is what Paul is saying to Timothy, and he could be saying those same exact things as he puts his right hand on one shoulder and his left hand on the other shoulder and looks us dead in the eye and says, “There are things that scare you. Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of.” That is what your Lord wants you to do.

Now think about it a second—think of the persistence that we often see, not always, but often we see a persistence that is pretty self centered, isn’t it? That little kid in the checkout lane—he isn’t begging for whatever piece of candy he wants because he wants to share it with mom. It’s because he wants to gobble it down and enjoy it all himself, right? Sometimes persistence is just selfishness that’s given expression as we hold our breath until we get what we want.

Is God being selfish when he tells you and me to continue in what you know and have become convinced of? Does God need you to sing his praises? Does God need you to get to know him better? Does God need anything from you?—of course not. I know

me, and you know you. What could he possibly want from people like us? We fall short so often of what he asks of us, it's amazing he accepts our praise at all when we offer it up to him.

But God is persistent because he is God. He is loving, and he wants to bless us. He was persistent when he walked the face of this earth as Jesus the God-man. He was persistent in meeting every temptation of Satan that came—to look the other way, to turn the other way, to do something else, accept the will of his Father, but he came so that we might have life and have it to the full. So he lived in our place and died in our place. He took away our sins so we are fully forgiven, fully restored and we have the full life of now being able to walk hand in hand with God—not afraid of him that he is going to judge us or afraid of him that he is going to punish us. We know that he has punished Christ so we can walk hand and hand with him and get to know him better, more closely, more intimately through Word and through Sacrament.

He nags us at times, doesn't he? Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. If you hold to my teaching, then you are my disciples. Over and over he tells us to be in the Word. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly—not just a little here and a little there, but one of those ooey, gooey chocolate desserts that you won't eat because it is too rich, with too many calories. That is how he wants you to gobble up his Word and his Sacraments. He wants you to eat it abundantly so that you are close to him so that he can strengthen your faith.

He is persistent because he knows how desperately you and I need it. He knows how we need to hear that persistent message, "You have sinned. You failed me, but Christ has lived and died in your place. I love you. You are forgiven. Your sins have been washed away." That is why he hounds us. He hounds us because he knows how good it is for us to hear this message. And he knows that if we chase after the things that we want to chase after, we won't be getting closer to him. We will be getting farther away from him.

Now here is the problem. As we get farther away, we still live in a world that is far from perfect and in a far from perfect world we are going to find all kinds of things that challenge us and scare us and threaten us. And if we are walking at more than arms length from God, it is going to be hard to face them. So God is persistent and he begs us to walk close to him and to know him better because that Word is useful for teaching—teaching us how to face the things that life brings at us. It's useful for rebuking—pointing out the times that we have failed so that we know to look back to God so we don't become hardened in our sins and impenitence. It's useful for correcting us and training us in righteousness and how to live and how to face the things of day to day life with God at our side—the One who makes us righteous. It's useful for thoroughly equipping us for every good work.

I've seen some of those good works. Some of those good works are things like when we face the difficulties of life and the closer we walk to God, the sooner we flee into his arms when we don't know what to do. The closer we walk to God when we see a loved one leave, the more we rejoice that they are with their Lord and don't focus immediately

on ourselves. Or, when we do focus on ourselves and our loss, we find comfort in that knowledge that they are with the Lord and one day we will be also, instead of just wallowing in that self pity.

God never promises that he is going to take all the hurts away. But he gives you and me an ability to deal with them that if we are far away from him we just don't have. So when God hounds us to get into Word and Sacraments, he is doing it so that we can be blessed. Again, don't think he needs it from you. Don't think you are doing him a favor when you pick up the Bible instead of the TV Guide. Don't think you are doing him a favor when you come to the Lord's Supper. He is doing all the work. You're receiving all the blessing and you are being strengthened so that you can continue to face the things that you will need to face in this world.