

# The Power of Persistence

*A sermon by The Rev. Daniel Simons  
at St. Paul's on the Green, Norwalk, CT*

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LECTIONARY: GENESIS 32:22-31; LUKE 18:1-8

*When Jesus comes,  
will he find faith on the earth?*

It's not a rhetorical question.  
Or maybe it is, but maybe it's:  
What KIND of faith will he find?

This is a real question right now,  
as several Christian "faiths" are showing up in the public square.

The incredibly irreverent but incisive long-running show South Park  
is treating that right now.

In this week's episode *Twisted Christian*  
where the Christian school has hired Jesus Christ  
as the school guidance counselor.  
And Jesus tangles with the school's *Power Christian Principal*.  
Jesus keeps trying to point to  
humility, mercy, inward transformation,  
while Power Christian is stridently preaching  
coercion, political clout, spectacle.

If South Park is too much,  
something more to our Episcopalian speed:  
*NPR Explains*, which is in the middle of a series called  
*Why Are People Leaving Religion?*  
It was about the current mass exodus in America  
from organized religion.  
The statistics indicate we might be just decades away  
from the end of several denominations,  
including our own.

That doesn't mean that faith is dying,  
just that it's forms are radically changing shape.  
What being faithful means is up for discussion.

Let's turn to today's Scriptures to wrestle with this:

So there was this widow,  
Jesus says,  
and she just would not stop showing up.

Day after day she stands before the judge —  
a man with no reverence,  
no compassion,  
no moral center.

She keeps demanding justice,  
and he keeps brushing her off,  
until finally he says,  
“Ugh! — She's going to wear me out.”

And she does.  
A powerless woman in a corrupt system,  
refuses to give up on what is right,  
on what is true,  
on what is possible, with God.  
who wins by showing up persistently.

And Jesus says,  
that's what faith in action looks like.

## There is Power in Persistence.

This kind of persistent faith  
is actually something we need to struggle for.  
And it always costs us something.

Look at Jacob,  
wrestling all night on the riverbank.  
He knows he's outmatched  
but he won't let go  
refusing to let go until the blessing comes.  
He gets a new name,  
a new identity: ISRAEL,  
which means "*one who strives with God and prevails.*"

And he gets the blessing —  
AND a limp that lasts the rest of his life.

That's how real faithful transformation works.  
It leaves a mark on us.  
You don't walk the same after you've seen God.  
You don't live the same after you have been loved deeply,  
or when you have suffered honestly,  
The limp becomes the sign  
that you stayed in the struggle long enough to be changed.

And then there's Mary,  
who gives us our stewardship theme for this year.  
Another powerless nobody from nowhere  
who refuses silence.

Her song is like the widow's cry turned into music.  
Or like Jacob's wrestling turned into joy.

"My soul magnifies the Lord," she says.  
"My spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

This isn't sweet sentiment.  
**It's revolutionary courage.**  
She sings of the mighty cast down,  
the lowly lifted up,  
the hungry filled.

Her song is powerful persistence with a melody.  
And that's the song we're singing this season —  
**Tell out my soul.**  
That theme of our Stewardship season  
is a great one for this very moment.

This is our Magnificat moment.  
Faith that keeps showing up.  
This is a time when we need faith like that —  
faith that wrestles,  
that won't let go against impossible odds,  
faith that keeps singing —  
That's exactly the faith that keeps this place —  
and our hearts —  
alive.

Every year we come to this season  
and ask ourselves how do we sustain the work,  
how do we keep the song going strong.  
This is a different question than  
how do we prop up the institution.

I want to pledge with you  
to finding and deepening the kind of faith  
that wrestles till dawn,  
that wears out the rulers for justice,  
that shows up singing in the face of tyranny.

I want to do that with you  
because I know that's a way that comes from  
and leads to Abundance —  
God's abundance,  
It is the way of authentically following Jesus.

We've seen what abundance can do.  
Think of what happens when you see someone be generous  
it makes you want to be generous, right?  
Think about Mirella's talk last Sunday.  
Didn't that open your heart?  
Do we need to hear anything more?!

When that becomes collective  
it becomes a real force in the world.

St. Paul's is a good place to have heart surgery.  
it's a good place to double down on welcoming the stranger.  
it is a good place to practice belonging in a fractured world.

This place is burning brighter and brighter in Norwalk.  
Some of us met last week with community leaders  
who talked about how St. Paul's can become a community hub  
for resources that help immigrants and others most at risk.

LOTS of us showed up  
on the streets of Stamford and Westport yesterday,  
to say that Radical Welcome is not just good for churches  
it's good for People.  
We, the People.

Faith made visible  
is what it looks like  
when a community refuses to let go or be quiet  
until the blessing comes.

I would say  
That's what stewardship really is.  
It's not an obligation,  
**but a declaration.**  
A way of saying —  
We are still here.  
Persistent.  
We are still wrestling for justice,  
still giving ourselves to hope,  
still investing in the future  
that belongs only to God  
and which God is shaping through us.  
“When the Son of Man comes,  
will he find faith on the earth?”

I am curious to find out what that will look like, through us.

So this stewardship season,  
as you pray and decide what to give,  
to sustain this work,  
double down.

— remember the widow —  
who wore out injustice by refusing to stay silent and sit on the sidelines  
Remember Jacob —  
who found his identity by hanging in,  
and wrestling until the dawn comes  
Remember Mary —  
who sang the revolution of God's justice.

Their story is our story.

Keep the faith.  
Give with gusto.  
And don't ever stop singing.