

**Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost**  
**October 19-20, 2013**  
**Luke 18:1-8**

*“Living Generously: The Stewardship of Persistence”*

The teachers of the hearing-impaired young man labeled him “stupid” and “unteachable.” As a child, he accidentally burned down the family barn. As a young man, he was fired from his first job working for the railroad company when his attentiveness to work resulted in a train derailment. Even after he began his career, his work did not earn him recognition. When his discoveries were brought before a British Parliament committee, they described these discoveries as “unworthy of the attention of practical or scientific men.” Asked in his later years about the many detours and roadblocks that he faced, the now-famous man said “I never failed once. It [success] happens to be a 2,000-step process.” That man was Thomas Edison, whose very name is equated with discoveries and inventions that changed the world ([http://www.ehow.com/info\\_8053170\\_inspirational-stories-perseverance.html#ixzz2hpcbh3no](http://www.ehow.com/info_8053170_inspirational-stories-perseverance.html#ixzz2hpcbh3no)). Truly, persistence can take a person far in life, but it isn’t easy to be persistent, especially when everyone around you is telling you to give up. Even in matters of faith, there is a need to be persistent; to hang in there and not give up. That is the focus of today’s message as we close out this 3-part series on Christian stewardship, “Living Generously.” The theme for today’s message is “The Stewardship of Persistence.” May the Lord’s rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus’ sake.

Living generously requires great faith and great persistence. Persistence is what we see in today’s Scripture lessons. In the Old Testament lesson (Genesis 32:22-30), Jacob is headed back home after being away for many years. Jacob, whose very name means “deceiver,” had to run for his life because he deceived his twin brother Esau, cheating him out of their father, Isaac’s, blessing. There was bad blood between the two brothers, and now at long last Jacob and his entire family are headed back home. But what kind of reception is he going to get back home? Maybe Esau still wants revenge and is just waiting for his brother to come near so he can settle the score. With all of this on his mind, Jacob spends the night alone there by the river Jabbok. He wrestles with a man all night long there on the river banks. That man was no mere man, but the Lord God, whom Jacob refused to let go until He blessed him. Following that great persistent struggle, Jacob limped away with a blessing and a new identity. He is no longer Jacob the deceiver, but he is now Israel, meaning “he strives with God.” Holy persistence drove Jacob to stick it out and persevere as he wrestled with God.

As stewards and managers of God’s gifts entrusted to our care, we are called, like Jacob, to persevere and persist in faith. The truth is, we’re often tempted to give up in our faith. Problems within and without seem to plague the Church, evil often seems to have the upper hand, and we wonder if lives – including our own – are really being impacted or transformed by the Gospel. And so instead of persisting in faith, our love begins to grow cold because we are not abiding in Jesus the true Vine (John 15). In the Epistle lesson (2 Timothy 3:14-2:5), Paul begins by writing to the young pastor, Timothy, encouraging him to **“continue in what you have learned and firmly believed.”** This is important! Why? Because without this steadfast persistence in continuing with what we have learned and firmly believed, we will become like those Paul warned Timothy about. We will **“not endure sound teaching, but... will accumulate ... teachers to suit [our] own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”** The stewardship of persistence in faith is critical for the sustaining and strengthening of our faith in Word and Sacrament. Without persistence in faith, there is resistance to faith, and we will become obstacles, impediments, and stumbling blocks to God’s kingdom coming and his will being done.

The stewardship of persistence is seen in the Gospel lesson (Luke 18:1-8) where Jesus tells a parable about a widow who continually comes before a judge petitioning him to grant her justice against her

adversary. Eventually the judge grants her request, even if it's not for the best of reasons. Jesus points out through this the need for patient persistence in prayer on our part. This is a call for God's people to persist in lives of faith and prayer and not giving up. Though health decline and financial security go down, God's people do not give up! Though the federal government may shut down, God's people do not give up! Though our circumstances in life may go down and cause us to wonder, God's people do not give up! God's people do not give up, but persevere in faith, continually crying out to the Lord and seeking his face in all things, trusting what the Lord Jesus tells us is true: **“And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily.”** The good news is that God has not given us what we justly deserve because of our sin and disobedience. Though our sins of thought, word and deed testify against God, though we have failed to practice faithful stewardship of God's gifts of time, talent and treasure, yet God has not given us what we justly deserve. Instead of rejection, punishment and condemnation, God has wiped the slate clean for each one of us through the cleansing blood of Jesus shed on Calvary's cross. Now clothed in Christ's own righteousness, the Savior calls us to lives of holy persistence and faithful obedience. Jesus' haunting question at the close of the Gospel lesson urges us to faithfulness until He comes again.

The stewardship of persistence figures heavily into living generously as God's people. Luther once said that “A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing.” Because of the blood-bought redemption we have in Christ, we now see our lives and the world around us in a new way. What we have is not our own; rather, it belongs to the Lord. We are merely the managers of what God has placed into our hands. Whether what we are managing is small or large, we are called to persist in faithfully managing all things to God's glory and for the blessing of others. Through your tithes and offerings that are faithful and persistently given, God's kingdom work is being done. Lives are being touched with the good news of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. Human needs are being addressed with care and compassion. Church facilities are being maintained and improved, all to the glory of God.

I sometimes wonder what our world would be like today if Thomas Edison and others like him had not doggedly and persistently carried on with their experiments and inventions? What if they had given up in the face of criticism, ridicule, and lack of support? Things might look very different if they had. People of God and fellow members of St. John's, this is a call for you to exercise that stewardship of persistence in living generously. This is a call for each one of us to rededicate all that we are and have to the Lord's gracious will and purpose in the world today. May God help us to do this for Jesus' sake. Amen.