

Sermon for Proper 24 Year C
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Thankful Memorial Episcopal Church

Kelton Riley, Seminarian

Continue in what you have learned. Be persistent. Pray always. Do not lose heart. I will be their God. They shall be my people. If there's a unifying theme across the lectionary today it seems to be one of consistency, of steadiness—a call to be steadfast in the faith. The second letter to Timothy exhorts us to be persistent in proclaiming the message, whether we find ourselves in favorable or unfavorable times. In Luke's gospel, Jesus tells us disciples that we must pray always—to live a life saturated in prayer. Steadfastness can be a tricky business for us humans. It seems to be a part of our nature to grow fatigued or distracted by the fluster of the anxious world around us—we're just so very finite. How can we remain steady in such an unsteady world?

The scriptures today are well aware that world around us can be destabilizing. Jeremiah speaks of the Israelites who had broken their covenant with God time and again. Paul warns of false teachers who will turn away from sound doctrine, who will not remain steadfast in the truth, but will wander away to myths. Jesus tells the story of an unjust judge, one who is supposed to be a worker of justice, but who had lost all regard for the very justice he was supposed to administer. We don't have to look far in our own day to find similar examples. Sometimes our systems of justice fail. Sometimes our teachings err. Sometimes our vows get broken. Sometimes it may be tempting to think that corruption is the only consistent thing in this world. Is it any wonder that Jesus asks, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" How can we remain steady in such an unsteady world when our faith is so very small? So small... barely the size of a mustard seed... Yet fear not. For even when our faith is no bigger than a mustard seed, we already have more than enough.

While today's readings are fully aware of the condition of the world, they are also fully aware that there is hope! Jeremiah reminds us that the consistency to which we are called is not dependent on us alone. Though the Israelites had broken the covenant, God did not break it—he *renewed* it. God was faithful, even when they were not. God *is* faithful, even when *we* are not. When God calls us back, again and again to relationship with him, he is promising to write his law on our hearts, to be our God. And when we return, again and again to relationship with him, we are consenting to have his law written on our hearts, to be his people, to *know* him.

Paul describes the word of scripture as being "inspired by God," literally God-breathed. And when that word is written on our heart, the Holy Spirit breathes into us, animating the very dust of our being—an echo of Eden—an ongoing act of creation that makes us ever and again God's people, reminding us that in the beginning was the Word through whom all things were created and have their being. Throughout the ages God *has called* us back to himself. Throughout the ages God *calls* us back to himself. Throughout the ages God *will call* us back to himself. His is nothing if not *consistent*. It is only in God's consistency that we are able to cultivate our own. Like children imitating their parents, our efforts may be small in comparison. But as we practice our faith, through consistent prayer, study of scriptures, and life in community

together, we grow increasingly proficient at it, “equipped for every good work” as Paul says, increasingly able to “pray always and not lose heart.” It is this life in Christ that steadies us in an unsteady world.

As we reflect on cultivating habits of consistency and steadiness, stewardship season offers us an opportunity to both rest in the faithfulness of God and consider our own response to God’s faithfulness. When we take time to discern our stewardship, we are reflecting on and renewing our commitment to the covenant with our God. And if we are to be persistent in proclaiming the message of the Kingdom, I think it may be helpful to take stock of the ways we are already doing that work so that we can continue in it. So, if you’ll bear with me, I’m going to ask for a little congregational participation. As I list off some of the ministries I have observed here at Thankful, please stand as you are able if you have participated in one listed here and remain standing. If standing is uncomfortable for you maybe raise your hand or give me a big nod.

- Sung in the choir
- Brought your children to church
- Served as lector, acolyte, or crucifer
- Offered comfort or encouragement to someone
- Served on vestry
- Brought items for Metmin outreach
- Sang along as we walked, danced, jumped, flew and surfed in the light of God
- Served as altar guild or ushers
- Helped with maintenance and workdays on the church grounds
- Prayed for the church and for the world
- Set up or cleaned up for coffee hour
- Taken a meal to someone
- Been present and received the sacrament

Take a moment to look around. Look at the work that is already being done! Look at the community that God has built and is building in you, Thankful! You are a beacon of steadiness in an unsteady world. You provide hope that when the Son of Man comes, he may yet find faith on earth. Amen.