

They Persisted

Luke 18:1-8, Genesis 32:22-31

Some years back, the Majority Leader of the U.S. Senate objected to a colleague's speech for an alleged rule violation. She was then banned from participating in the confirmation hearing about a nominee for Attorney General. Her violation? She had read a letter by Coretta Scott King that was critical of the Senator being nominated. Afterwards, the Majority Leader made a comment on the floor about her insisting to read that letter after being warned: "Nevertheless, she persisted." His attempted scolding about decorum, however, instantly became a red badge of courage for anyone who will not be shushed or shamed into silence. She did persist.

That outcome should not be surprising. Persistence, Biblically speaking, is a virtue. We hear that affirmed and embodied in both Luke and Genesis.

Jesus weaves a parable about a woman who will not be shushed when she pleads with a judge for justice. Two things are clear in the story. First, the judge is so full of himself that Jesus' describes him as one "who neither feared God nor had respect for people." Second, the woman refuses to be dismissed. She persists: until the judge relents, until justice is done.

In Genesis, another story of persistence reveals its life-changing potential. Jacob wrestles all night with a stranger. The story leaves it open as to the stranger's identity. Is Jacob wrestling with the memory of his estranged brother Esau whom he had defrauded? Is the stranger an angel? Is the stranger's identity veiled in the name Jacob bestows on this place: *peniel*, "face of God?" Whoever the stranger may be, Jacob persists though his hip is put out of joint. Even then he refuses to let go until the stranger blesses Jacob. As a result, Jacob leaves this place named "face of God" with both a limp and the blessing of a new identity. *Jacob*, whose name in Hebrew means "heel," is renamed with the Hebrew word meaning "one who strives with God:" *Israel*.

*Nevertheless, **they persisted**:* the woman in the parable, Jacob in the night. They persisted: and justice and blessing eventually came.

For Reflection and Action:

If you could ask Jesus one thing about persistence in this parable: what would it be, and why?

What do you find helpful, or confusing, about persistence connected to "striving with God?"

In your discipleship, in the life of the Church: where might persistence be needed today?