

Wesley United Methodist Church
October 20, 2013
“Hang in There.”
Luke 18: 1-8

On August 3, 1970, sixty-two-year-old Miriam Hargrave of Yorkshire, England, finally passed her driving test. It was her fortieth attempt. After much struggle and perseverance, one would assume she started driving right away. But unfortunately, after spending so much money on driving lessons, she couldn't afford to buy a car. Maybe it's just as well. How comfortable would you be, knowing that the driver coming at you had failed the driving test forty times?

Another Brit, the Rev. David guest required 632 lessons over a period of 17 years before he passed his driving test. “When I was told I passed, I bent down on my knees and thanked God,” he said after passing the test. The 33-year-old cleric spent \$11,000 on lessons, wore out eight instructors and crashed five cars before that momentous accomplishment. The secret to that turnaround; he finally switched to a car with an automatic transmission.

We admire people who refuse to give up, who refuse to cut their losses even when they are pursuing such mundane tasks as passing a driver's test. Of course, there are some people we wish would give up.

There was a salesman named Barry, who was having a bad day. It was noon. He was in his favorite diner where he was forced, by the overcrowded noon crowd, into sharing his table with a very large woman who was wearing a very loud print dress and green gloves which went to her elbows. After some superficial conversation, Barry asked Angela, the lady at his table, her profession.

“I'm a messenger,” said Angela proudly. “A messenger? From whom?”

“From Her.” “Her who?” “You know, Her... God.”

After Barry caught his composure, he asked Angela, “Ok...suppose you are a messenger from...uh...Her...then what's the message?” “The message,” says Angela without batting an eye, “is: ‘Hang in there!’” Maybe that's the message from God we need to hear this day, whether God is a Him or a Her. I don't know what you're going through right now in your life. I don't what dreads or dreams you are currently nurturing. I don't know what frustrations, failures or fears occupy you. But oftentimes God's simple message to us is “Hang in there. Don't give up. Keep going. You're going to make it.”

Jesus told a story once about an unjust judge. This judge, said Jesus, had no fear of God and cared even less about what other people might think of him. He took bribes and gave favors to persons who held positions and authority. He didn't worry about conscience or law, about morality or justice. He was out to fill his pockets and to gain honor and recognition from those who held position, power, and wealth.

But there was a widow who needed his help. She was poor. She had no money to bribe him even if that were her inclination. She was a widow, a woman all alone in a man's world. She had no man and no money to secure legal counsel to plead her case. She held no position or authority, none of the necessary clout to commend her to the judge. But she was being persecuted, being taken advantage of and abused by an unknown adversary. Still, she let none of this stop her. Time and again she kept coming to the judge with her plea, “Grant me justice against my adversary.”

At first the judge responded with silence. He didn't make a move to help her. His heart was hard and harsh; he had no interest in helping anyone who would not benefit his career or fill his pockets. But the poor widow kept on coming and coming, pleading and pleading. She would not

let the judge rest. And notice what happened. The judge did not fear God, did not regard man's opinions, yet he finally gave into the widow and gave her the justice she was seeking. Why? Because she wouldn't give up. He couldn't get rid of her. She would not accept silence or take no for an answer. She kept coming and coming. This widow was persistent. She refused to let this corrupt judge go! It's one of those quirky little parables that Jesus loved to tell. But he adds a very serious moral to it. "And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly."

These words were designed for people who were suffering unjustly for their faith. "Hang in there," he was saying to them. "God hears your prayers. Hang in there and trust Him and you will not be disappointed."

We talked about this last week how important it is to keep trusting God's promises, no matter what your situation. This is a major part of the meaning of faith. Having faith is more than simply saying, "I believe in God." Faith is trusting God whatever your circumstance.

There is an amusing story about a business man who had to travel to another town for a business meeting. He invited his wife to accompany him. She was excited about the trip...until she learned her husband was going to be flown to the town in a small twin-engine Cessna plane. "Honey, I've decided not to go," she said to him unexpectedly. "What!" he exclaimed in disbelief. "Why not?" She declared with some firmness, "I am not going on a little-bitty, twin-engine Cessna." Honey, your faith is too small," he said smiling. "No, dear, your plane is too small." The business man really wanted his wife to go with him, so he canceled the Cessna and booked travel on a major airline. His wife went with him because as she put it, "her faith grew because the size of the plane grew." Some of us can relate to her concern. It's difficult to feel secure in a plane that seems too small. Even more defeating, however, is the belief that our God is too small to look after you.

J.B. Phillips once wrote a book with the title, *Your God is Too Small*. And he was right on target. Many people have a God who is simply too small. The greatest problem that most of us have is either an insufficient faith or an inadequate God. Trust God and hang on. Trust God and keep going. Many people experience defeat in life because they simply give up too soon. Don't let that be said of your life. Don't miss out on possible blessings because you became discouraged.

That is particularly important serving Christ. Some people get their feelings hurt in a church meeting, and suddenly they're missing from the fellowship. Others get burned out, because the results of their labors for Christ seem negligible or non-existent. Christ is speaking directly to you. Hang in there. The results of your labors are not in vain. You are building up treasure in heaven.

Glenn Wasson was clearing brush in the mountains when he took a lunch break. He sat on a log by a rushing stream, woods all around him, and bit into his sandwich. Suddenly a persistent bee began tormenting him, buzzing around his head, as if it intended to sting him. Glenn waved it off, but quickly it returned. This time he swatted it to the ground and stepped on it. He thought his problem was solved, but to his amazement, the bee emerged from the sand to renew its attack.

Before he had a chance to get airborne again, Glenn ground the insect into the sand. That should do it, he thought. He resumed his lunch. As he finished his lunch, out of the corner of his eye he noticed the bee burrowing out from its sandy grave. Glenn, intrigued, bent over to watch.

The bee's right wing seemed all right, but the left one was "crumpled like a piece of paper." Nonetheless, the bee with great patience stretched and tried its damaged wing, moving it slowly up and down. It ran its legs along the length of the wing, trying to straighten it out. The damage seemed irreparable. Glenn, being a veteran pilot, knew a good deal about wings. As he knelt down watching the bee, he concluded that the bee would never fly again.

That bee, however, had other ideas. It stretched out the damaged wing and increased the tempo of its fluttering. Then the bee attempted valiantly to fly. It managed an elevation of three inches before crashing back to earth. It tried again and again. Each effort was a little more successful, though sometimes that bee would fly erratically this way or that. At last, the bee took off, buzzed over the stream, and was gone.

"As it disappeared," Glenn said, "I realized that I was still on my knees and I remained on my knees for some time."

Well, friends, that bee demonstrated a faith that you and I can only envy. Some of us quit even before we really get started. When that happens, remember the bee. When that happens remember the woman whom Jesus told about who kept demanding justice until she wore a crooked judge down. Don't miss out on one of the real secrets of life: Hang in there! Keep stretching that damaged wing until you can fly.