

Next we turn to another of the parables that Luke records Jesus saying. We have been reading several of Jesus' parables over the past few weeks. Parables are stories that Jesus shared that used everyday images to communicate deeper meanings.

Chapter 13 of the gospel of Luke begins with identifying two situations that are told only by Luke. Luke describes the death of Galileans who were killed by Pontius Pilate and Luke describes the death of 18 people who were killed when a tower fell over.

Luke says that their deaths are a reminder of how short and unpredictable life can be. Luke uses these experiences to teach the importance of not wasting our time on earth. Each day is a gift from God and we are to cherish each day as a gift.

After quoting Jesus talking about the importance of each day, Luke offers us a parable that seems to be a contrast to this story in many ways.

Luke 13:6-9

Thomas Edison set out to invent a commercially viable electric lightbulb. He tried to invent one and he failed. He tried to invent it again and he failed. He tried to invent a light bulb again and he failed. In fact, Thomas Edison tried over 10,000 times to invent a commercially viable electric lightbulb and he failed over and over and over again.

So why did he not give up? In one interview with American Magazine, Thomas Edison said the following:

“I never allow myself to become discouraged under any circumstances. I recall that after we had conducted thousands of experiments on a certain project without solving the problem, one of my associates expressed discouragement and disgust over our having failed ‘to find out anything.’

I cheerily assured him that we had learned something. For we had learned for a certainty that the thing couldn’t be done that way, and that we would have to try some other way. We sometimes learn a lot from our failures if we have put into the effort the best thought and work that we are capable of giving.”

Thomas Edison was a man of perseverance. We have read two parables this morning about perseverance. In the first parable that we read, Jesus describes a judge who did not fear God nor did he have respect for people. In the parable, Jesus says that there was a widow who had no political clout but she kept coming to the judge over and over again demanding justice for herself.

The judge ignored her over and over again but she kept pestering the judge over and over and over again. Finally the judge gives in because he is tired of dealing with the widow. He finally grants her justice. Jesus then says that her perseverance is like prayer. If we don’t see an answer to our prayer then pray some more. If we still don’t see an answer to our prayer then pray some more. If we still don’t see an answer to our prayer then we keep praying and praying and praying.

We also see this celebration of perseverance in the second parable that we read today. In the parable that I read, Jesus tells the story of a man with a fig tree that does not bear any fruit for year one and year two and in year three. Now when John the Baptist talks about unproductive trees he says to cut them down. But in this parable that Jesus tells he says don’t give up yet. Instead, put some manure around the tree and give it one more shot.

Patience and perseverance are celebrated in these two parables that we read. Patience with God and perseverance with our responsibilities while we wait.

We have a situation in this church right now where it appears that there is a dead tree that is not bearing fruit. I am going to invite Jennifer Adkins forward to share about what is happening to her right now.

(Jennifer is scheduled to go to Liberia on our mission trip in less than 2 weeks. She is a public school teacher. Her superintendent has denied her request to attend.)

Tomorrow the principal and the superintendent are meeting. I am going to ask all of you to be in prayer for that meeting. You are not the only ones in prayer. The Christ Missionary Assembly congregation in Liberia is also in prayer for Jennifer.

The contact information for the superintendent is listed in your bulletin. If she is convinced to change her mind by the principal I will ask you on Tuesday to send her emails and letters of thanks. If she denies this request I will ask you on Tuesday to flood her email inbox with emails and with letters asking her to reconsider this request. Either way I am going to ask that you follow the model of the persistent widow and the gardener who kept putting on more and more manure.

In the first parable Jesus says that when we face obstacles we pray, we pray, and we pray some more. In the second parable we learn that we don't give up, we put on some more manure, and we see what happens. I don't know what is going to happen. But I am going to invite us to pray and maybe agitate. Maybe agitate quite a bit if it comes to that.

Whatever happens I am going to trust that God is in control and that God is going to work out God's will somehow. But in the meantime we pray and we take action.
AMEN.

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-Texts: Luke 13:1-9; Luke 18:1-8

-Given: January 19, 2017 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)