

Luke 18:1-8, Genesis 32:22-31
St. Andrew Lutheran Church, Franklin, TN
Consecration Sunday
Sunday, October 20, 2019
Pastor Karen Boda

Please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

A tiny news article caught my eye a few weeks ago.¹ An art exhibit in Japan included the statue of a woman sitting in a chair. This statue elicited threats and invoked riots, and the exhibit was shut down for 2 months. This statue depicted a *Comfort Woman*.

Some of you may have heard about the Comfort Women - women and girls of Korea, China, and the Philippines who were forced into sex slavery by the Imperial Japanese Army during World War II. According to testimonies, these women were abducted then lured with promises of work. Once recruited, they were incarcerated for the “comfort” of the soldiers. The number of women and girls may run as high as 400,000.

For 50 years, these women and their story have been silenced. The story has been considered *mere fiction*. Dismissed. The women shamed. Blamed. The art exhibit was shut down, critics say, not for safety concerns, but because of censorship.

What’s interesting, though, is that since 1992, those Comfort Women still living, hold what are called the Wednesday Demonstrations. These women protest *every Wednesday* in front of the Japanese Embassy in

¹ <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/10/08/national/controversial-art-exhibition-comfort-woman-statue-nagoya-south-korea/#.XZ5MckZKjD4>

Seoul. Over a period of 27 years... 52 weeks per year... there have been over fourteen hundred demonstrations! Fourteen hundred!

Why do they demonstrate, week after week and year after year, when protestors gather to threaten and shout at them? When people claim *they* are the ones to blame?

It's because these women live in hope that something will change. A wrong will be acknowledged. An apology made. It is the hope that women forced to live lives of shame will be finally freed. Released. That's what keeps them demonstrating. It's the hope.

In our Old Testament lesson, Jacob wrestled with the man at the river Jabbok. Over and over these two go at it. All night long they wrestle. Both hold fast. Neither one will turn away. Jacob is *not* wrestling for victory. He is not wrestling because he is against God, or God is against him. He wrestles instead with hope.

Finally, as daybreak nears, Jacob exclaims, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." I will not give up...until you bless me. Then Jacob received that divine blessing. That new name. That commitment by God to go with him into the encounter with Esau, and into the future. It was that hope of God's relationship which kept Jacob wrestling all night long.

In our gospel from St. Luke we've just heard the often told parable of the tenacious widow and the judge. Over and over the widows asks...she nags. She demands justice from a judge who could hardly care less. In the words of the NRSV translation, the judge is worried that the woman will *wear him out* with her constant nagging. That's perhaps too soft of language.

In the Greek these words of nagging are language from the sport of boxing. The judge is worried that this widow will beat him black and blue. So he grants her the justice that she's seeking.

If this insensitive judge will finally give justice to the widow, how much more will God give to us?

Jesus tells us to pray like the widow until the hope of justice is realized. To wrestle like Jacob not only until we are tired, or until our hip has been thrown out of socket, but until the hope of a blessing becomes a reality. To demonstrate like the Comfort Women, even more than 1400 times until justice is acknowledged.

Theologian Kimberly Bracken Long says that our constant prayers are our participation in the coming kingdom of God. By praying continually, by wrestling, by demonstrating, we are trusting in God, not in ourselves. We are embodying the *confidence* that God has not abandoned this world.² That God is with us. You see our constant prayer is actively *hoping for* the coming kingdom of God, then *working confidently* until that kingdom becomes a reality.

Martin Luther said often that prayer is *both* a command and a promise. The second commandment, to not take the name of the Lord our God in vain, is a command to praise that holy name and call upon it in every need. To pray. But with that command to pray comes the promise that God *will hear and answer* all our prayers. It's a promise that the kingdom will come.

Did you notice that our gospel text ends today with a question? Jesus asks: When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth? Will Jesus find that we have kept praying, wrestling, and working for justice? Will Jesus find that we have been as persistent as the widow? As tenacious as Jacob? As insistent as the Comfort Women? Will Jesus find that we have embodied our prayers?

² Editors Barbara Brown Taylor and David Bartlett, *Feasting on the Word, Year C Volume 4* (Westminster Press: Knoxville), 190

Today, on this Consecration Sunday, many of us will take a card and place it into the basket. On that card will be a financial commitment for the work of this congregation and our time and talents. By making that commitment today, we are committing to give week after week. Why do we do this?

This congregation has worked in feeding ministries, like St. Paul's Breakfast Ministry and Meals on Wheels and the list goes on. Have you noticed that you provide food one week, feed lots of people, but when you go back the next week, there are just as many hungry people or perhaps even more? Each and every week when you return, the hungry are there *again*.

Each week we put money into the offering plate, or use online giving, and then the next week, the offering plate is passed again. Week after week after week. Sometimes it feels like we've been wrestling all night long. Or demonstrating 1400 times. It can feel like knocking on the judge's door until our knuckles are bloody. Or giving to a bottomless offering plate week after week after week. Why do we do this?

We do this with *determination* because like Jacob, we need God's presence. We need an ongoing relationship with God. We do this with *persistence* because like the widow, we live with confidence that justice will be done. That our prayers will be answered. That the kingdom will come. We do this, without losing hope, unrelenting in our belief that despite all, as partners with God, the kingdom will come.

Let it be so.

Amen.