

Sermon Note: Persistent Faith

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Introduction

This week we continue exploring stewardship, recognizing that we are **Standing on the Shoulders of Giants**. This takes intentional work, sometimes over months and sometimes across generations. Stewardship can often take the form of ordinary persistence—returning, tending, and trusting that our faithful generosity matters, even if the outcome isn't completely clear. In Luke, a widow refuses to give up seeking justice. In 1 Corinthians, Paul describes the shared labor of planting and watering—by laborers who may not even see the work others are doing—knowing that growth ultimately belongs to God. Both texts invite us to see faith as steady participation in God's work across time. With this persistence, communities endure and even flourish, a living witness to enduring faith.

Illustration Videos

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZQz0rkNajo>

In this trailer from *The Dig* (2021), we get a glimpse of a compelling story about a wealthy widow and an amateur archaeologist hired to excavate the burial mounds on her estate. In the process of excavating, they make a historic discovery that pits the echoes of Britain's past against a deeply uncertain future.

Why This Video?

This trailer from *The Dig* (2021) moves between careful work and gathering storm. A widow's curiosity and an excavator's quiet skill meet at the edge of history, where discovery feels both personal and fleeting. We see soil lifted, tools passed, and faces marked by both patience and uncertainty. Set in 1939, the world is shifting toward war. Even so, they faithfully continue the work before them. It's a picture of endurance, of work that carries the labor and devotion of countless hands, from those who built the mounds to those who now tend them. The connection between past and present brings the smallest glimmer of hope in the face of an uncertain future.

Video Discussion Questions

1. What stood out to you as the digging began — the field itself, the voices, or the way they moved into the mystery of the mounds?
2. How did you sense the relationship between the widow and the excavator changing as the work unfolded?
3. The trailer moves quickly between discovery and the approach of war. How does this shift affect the way you feel about what they uncover?
4. Several lines mention time — life being fleeting, the first human handprint, being part of something continuous. Which of those ideas feel like they might stay with you?

5. What do you notice about the work itself—the patience, the determination, the care? What does it make you think about persistence?
6. When the museum officials arrive, does that moment alter your sense of whose work this is? If so, how?
7. The closing moments blend a variety of images and voices in a climax. What emotions linger for you at the end of the trailer?
8. If you imagine the people who buried the ship centuries earlier, what do you think they hoped would happen to their work?

1 Corinthians 3:1-11 (CEB)

¹Brothers and sisters, I couldn't talk to you like spiritual people but like unspiritual people, like babies in Christ. ²I gave you milk to drink instead of solid food, because you weren't up to it yet. ³Now you are still not up to it because you are still unspiritual. When jealousy and fighting exist between you, aren't you unspiritual and living by human standards? ⁴When someone says, "I belong to Paul," and someone else says, "I belong to Apollos," aren't you acting like people without the Spirit? ⁵After all, what is Apollos? What is Paul? They are servants who helped you to believe. Each one had a role given to them by the Lord: ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God made it grow. ⁷Because of this, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but the only one who is anything is God who makes it grow. ⁸The one who plants and the one who waters work together, but each one will receive their own reward for their own labor. ⁹We are God's coworkers, and you are God's field, God's building.

¹⁰I laid a foundation like a wise master builder according to God's grace that was given to me, but someone else is building on top of it. Each person needs to pay attention to the way they build on it. ¹¹No one can lay any other foundation besides the one that is already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Luke 18:1-8 (CEB)

¹Jesus was telling them a parable about their need to pray continuously and not to be discouraged. ²He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected people. ³In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him, asking, 'Give me justice in this case against my adversary.' ⁴For a while he refused but finally said to himself, I don't fear God or respect people, ⁵but I will give this widow justice because she keeps bothering me. Otherwise, there will be no end to her coming here and embarrassing me." ⁶The Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷Won't God provide justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he be slow to help them? ⁸I tell you, he will give them justice quickly. But when the Human One comes, will he find faithfulness on earth?"

Scripture Study Questions

1. In Luke 18, Jesus tells of a widow who keeps coming to a judge, pleading for justice. What do we learn about the widow and the judge from this parable?
2. The widow's persistence gives her a kind of strength that the judge lacks. Who are the voices in our world that keep showing up for justice, and what keeps them going?

3. The judge finally acts—not from compassion but from self-interest. How does this part of the story help us see the difference between doing right for convenience and doing right from conviction?
4. Jesus asks us to listen to what the unjust judge says. What do you hear in his response, and how does it expose the way systems resist change until they are pressed?
5. The parable ends with Jesus asking whether he will find faith on earth. What kind of faith do you think he's talking about? How does persistence relate to faith?
6. In 1 Corinthians 3:6–9, Paul speaks of planting and watering, each doing their part while God gives the growth. How does this image of shared work deepen our understanding of persistence in faith?
7. Paul reminds the Corinthians that they are co-workers in God's service. What does that mean for a church that is still growing, still learning how to serve together?
8. Both passages ask us to trust that faithful effort matters, even when we don't control the outcome. Where might you be called to keep showing up?

Additional (Optional) Questions

1. What does Jesus say about the judge's attitude and the widow's persistence in the parable?
2. What do you know about the social status of judges and widows at the time Jesus would have told this parable?
3. Why do you think Jesus uses a parable about an unjust judge to teach about persistence in prayer?
4. How can we apply the widow's persistence to our lives, especially when we feel discouraged or don't see immediate results?
5. Paul writes that no one can lay any foundation other than Christ. How do we build faithfully on that foundation in our life together as a community of faith?
6. Think of a time when your faith or your church's ministry required patience. What helped you stay steady in that moment?
7. How can your faith community continue to plant, water, and witness to God's justice together?

Weekly Action

This week, let your witness take the shape of persistence. Think of one place where patience and steady faith are needed — a relationship, a ministry, a community effort. Show up again for that work. Offer encouragement, lend your time, or simply keep tending what others have begun. Like the widow who refused to give up and the workers who kept planting and watering, our faith becomes a living testimony when we stay engaged in God's ongoing work.

Prayer

God of justice, you see what the powerful try to ignore. You honor the voices that won't be silenced. You call us not just to pray, but to persist. Give us the strength to keep showing up and the wisdom to name what's broken. Give us the courage to call systems to account. May our faith be bold, our voices strong, and our hope be grounded in justice. Amen.

Disclosure: This Sermon Note was created by LJUMC staff with resources from Discipleship Ministries of The United Methodist Church and with the support of AI tools.