### “Persistence” Steve Finlan for The First Church, July 24, 2022

**Psalm 138:4–8**

4 All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O Lord, for they have heard the words of your mouth. 5 They shall sing of the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord. 6 For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he perceives from far away.

7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me. 8 The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures for ever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

**Luke 11:5–13**

5 And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, “Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; 6for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.” 7And he answers from within, “Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.” 8I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

9 “So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 10For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 11Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? 12Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? 13If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Both of these passages hint at a kind of spiritual optimism, but I think it’s an optimism that needs to be ready for the unexpected. Maybe like the optimism you bring to the reading of mystery novels: you expect that the crime will be solved, but you also expect to be surprised a few times along the way. I think God has surprises for us along our way.

Let’s take a look at the psalm first. It expresses some strong personal faith. “All the kings of the earth shall . . . sing of the ways of the Lord” (138:4–5). That’s an optimistic view of the future. The Lord will hear the lowly, but he sees the arrogant people for what they are (v. 4). God is not deceived. The author says God will deliver him from his enemies. Even if he is lowly and in trouble, God will rescue him. Further, “The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me” (v. 8). That’s a strong affirmation of a spiritual future for the individual believer. Three big points are being made. God is truth, and cannot be deceived. God will deliver the believer from trouble. God will fulfill his purpose for the believer.

Jesus’ parable also has some optimism in it. The message is odd, in a way, for it says God will give you what you ask just because of your sheer persistence, rather than from friendship. We are not meant to take every aspect of a parable literally. Rather, each parable has a single point that it is making. The single point here is that persistence works, so *persist*. I think he makes the point in a humorous way, which should not surprise us.

The guy’s friend is surly and tired and doesn’t want to be bothered. But the guy persists; I can picture him continuing to plead his case outside the door, until finally his friend gets up, finds some bread and slams it into the guy’s hand, probably saying “Okay. You happy now? Are you going to let me get some sleep now?” It’s pretty humorous, because of the situation. Probably the friend is still friendly toward the main character. Maybe they could share a laugh about this experience later.

It’s an unusual way to highlight this lesson. The parable is then followed by a lesson that can also be found in Matthew. “Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened for you” (Luke 11:9). Then there’s the rhetorical question, if your child asked you for a fish, would you give him a snake? (11:11). Of course not. You’re nicer than that. And your heavenly Father is surely better than you, and knows how to give good gifts, even the Holy Spirit, to his children (11:13). This is a confident message similar to the psalm’s, affirming that God will take care of us. And it also uses humor. Can you see that child receiving a snake, and then a scorpion, and saying “*Da-ad!* Are you serious?” But earthly fathers know how to do better than that. Won’t our heavenly Father also know how to do better?

So the lesson is “search, and you will find.” Also, trust God to give you what you really need. God is a friend who is not reluctant to hear your pleas. However, this friend has the annoying habit of not giving you what you ask for, but rather giving you what you really need. So the surly and grouchy character in the story is probably *us*, grumbling when the friend gives us a salad when we had asked for a greasy cheeseburger, or gives us a job when we had asked for money.

How annoying to us, the moral rectitude and far-sightedness of our friend! We have to get used to trying to catch up to him, trying to understand what he’s likely to say to our pleas. We are constantly trying to synchronize our watches with his. We have to be ready for surprises, and learn to say “not what I want but . . . your will be done” (Matt 26:39, 42).

But let’s start getting used to it. Get used to seeking and asking, without being too attached to getting an immediate answer. Get used to trusting that the answer will come in due course. “Ask, and it will be given to you” (11:9)—or *something* will be given to you, probably not exactly what you asked for. But we should get used to seeking. Seeking spiritual gifts from God should be our regular attitude. Always have a hopeful and receptive attitude. We should always be on quest for something from God. If we persist with our spiritual quest, we will get blessings beyond our expectations, maybe even beyond our ability to imagine. The principle that you can hold on to is that the Lord will fulfill his purpose for you (Ps 138:8). There may be several purposes yet to be revealed. Keep praying to learn more of God’s will for your life.