

Year C, October 20, 2019
19 Pentecost (Proper 24)
Christ Church, Mexia

"In a 1992 *Reader's Digest* titled 'The Ultimate Key to Success,' Suzanne Chazin wrote:

Every day, a fatherless boy gazed at the fence separating his family's ramshackle cabin from the Glen Lakes golf course on the outskirts of Dallas. What chance did a poor Chicano boy with a seventh-grade education have of being welcomed into that world?

Yet, the boy was determined. First, he gained entrance to the grounds as a gardener. Then he began caddying and playing a few holes at dusk. He honed his putting skills by hitting balls with a soda bottle wrapped in adhesive tape.

Today no fence keeps Lee Trevino, two-time U.S. Open winner, from being welcomed into any country club in the nation.

Sure, Trevino had talent. But talent isn't what kept him from quitting after he placed an embarrassing fifty-fourth in his first U.S. Open. His secret was perseverance.

Persistent people know they can succeed where smarter and more talented people fail... Successful people understand that no one makes it to the top in a single bound. What truly sets them apart is their willingness to keep putting one step in front of the other – no matter how rough the terrain."

I'm going to go out on a limb and say that I don't think Jesus was talking about prayer in his story today like this story is often interpreted. Recall the context in which this story is being told; Jesus is teaching his disciples. What may be the lesson for today? It seems to me to be about persistence with hope in the outcome; to wit, persevering through the challenges of this life knowing that one day we will be with God.

I believe Jesus wants us to pursue our work on earth, especially that in support of his church like his disciples, with perseverance. As Samuel Johnson, English author, moralist and devout Anglican, noted: "Great works are performed not by strength but by perseverance."

Carol Porter reminds us of a story that also may clarify what Jesus meant and that illustrates Samuel Johnson's point: "For years William Wilberforce pushed Britain's Parliament to abolish slavery. Discouraged, he was about to give up. His elderly friend, John Wesley, heard of it and from his deathbed called for pen and paper.

With trembling hand, Wesley wrote: 'Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them stronger than God?

Oh be not weary of well-doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery shall vanish away before it.' Wesley died six days later but Wilberforce fought for 45 more years and in 1833, three days before his own death, saw slavery abolished in Britain."

Jesus knew what problems lay ahead for those who would follow him in ministry, and he was trying to instill in them persistence and hope. This way of interpreting his message also allows us to understand better the last sentence of the reading for today: "And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" This will happen when Jesus comes again, only if the disciples and those of us brought to the church by them persevere in their/our ministries.

Now, recall these words from 2nd Timothy, "For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths." Wow, when I read that I could not help but think about the present time in this country. As people abandon mainline churches for what I will refer to as the "Evangelical Christian" gospel or reject religion altogether to follow false gods and/or secular pleasures, this scripture reverberates all too loudly and widely. Now is the time when we need to help people understand what is truly important, more than ever, and it is the time when we must stand up for those who become marginalized, not only through our economic system but also because of this increasing trend toward self-centeredness.

As Phillips Brooks, Episcopal Bishop of Massachusetts in the 1890s said, "Do not pray for easy lives; pray to be stronger people! Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers; pray for powers equal to your tasks. Then the doing of your work shall be no miracle but you shall

be a miracle. Every day you shall wonder at yourself, at the richness of life which has come to you by the grace of God." Persistence and hope are what we desperately need today and what we need to share with others.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.
Amen.