

We're Not Going Anywhere

Isaiah 40:31, II Cor 4:8, 16-18

After I gave the title of my message to the office, I realized that it could be read two different ways. It COULD be read like: I'm out of here, this group is not doing anything important, we have no goals, and we are just holding down space in a building we can't afford on our own.

This is NOT the meaning I had in mind: I want to talk about persistence, which the dictionary defines as the steadfast continuation of a goal-directed action despite challenges, obstacles, or discouragement. It is one of the fruits of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, **faithfulness**, gentleness, and self-control. Faithfulness is another word for persistence. "We're not going anywhere" means we may not have been successful in our recent efforts, but that doesn't mean we are giving up and going away. We will not give up. We are in this struggle for the long run.

Sometimes, and maybe more often than not, the things we do don't seem to have any effect on the world at large. We try to speak truth to our community, but

- I went to a No Kings rally, what good did THAT do?
- I wrote a letter to the Editor, but nobody even reads the Newspaper anymore.
- We protested about ICE activities, but look what happened recently here in Spokane . Three people were found guilty of conspiracy, which carries a six-year jail sentence. People can be jailed for conspiracy for

just showing up with other protestors, with no weapons, no prior planning with others, just raising our voices or our hands. So how successful were we at stopping our government from coming for our neighbors who are immigrants, children and parents who have committed no crimes and are helping keep our economy afloat by supplying agricultural and industrial labor?

- Yes, we Quakers are pacifists, but there are still wars. There is even the idea being floated around that war and violence are inbred in humans, it is part of our genetic makeup. It's our original sin, and so to object to human violence is not only useless, but it goes against our very nature.

And yet, and yet we are called on to persevere, to hold on to our goal of bringing God's kingdom to earth, to hold on with "holy tenacity." We are in this for the long run. We do not expect to change the world today; we know we are in the minority. And yet we are not leaving the scene, we are not going anywhere, we are still here and we will continue to pray "Thy kingdom come . . . on earth as it is in heaven", and we will continue trying to increase the size of the beloved community and bring forth the kingdom of God on this earth of ours.

We can think of persistence as "faithfulness". The scriptures have so much to say about persistence – we think of Samuel's mother Hannah and her persistence in prayer about her infertility, and the whole book of Job is about hanging in there in spite of dire circumstances. Jesus also had some things to say about persistence: we think of the parable of the lost sheep, and the lost coin, and how often Jesus healed in response to persistence – the

blind beggar, the grieving parents, the lepers, and the friends who took apart a roof to lower down their friend to Jesus. He was willing to die rather than resist his “enemies” with violence and even asked God to forgive them. Paul speaks of persistence as running a race to the finish line. And the writer of Hebrews talks about a “great cloud of witnesses” who surround us as we run our own race.

I like to visualize this great cloud of witnesses being part of a long parade that we are part of. Way up front we can barely make out the Old Testament prophets, Jesus the ultimate faithful one, the Christian martyrs in the hostile Roman Empire, and later we see the leaders of the three “peace testimony” churches : Menno Simons in the 16th century, the founder of the Mennonite churches, and George Fox who headed the Quaker movement in the seventeenth century, followed by Alexander Mack, the founder of the Brethren church some sixty years later. And more recently Martin Luther King, and Desmond Tutu, and Nelson Mandela. Many of these people ahead of us in the parade gave up their lives rather than giving up the work God called them to do, with the Beatitudes as their template for action.

We persist because those before us have persisted and those after us will persist.

We are not talking about things that happen instantly – we are talking about **long obedience** as opposed to quick fixes. This does not come naturally to us – especially now -- when we are told that the average attention span in today’s world is about 3 sec – no doubt determined by how fast we scroll on our cell phones. We are tempted to move on if a relationship

becomes difficult. We see this happen in personal relationships (it's not about you, it's about me, I've changed, I love someone else now, I need a divorce . . .) and also moving on from groups we have belonged to, like clubs or classmates or church– (it just didn't do anything for me).

And this Long Obedience may last long enough to include **cultural change**, which also happens over time– and most of us don't really like change. We struggle to support our youth – because they look different than us. We are now learning that our youth experienced more social and psychological disorders than any of the older generations. The teenage years are traumatic enough without adding the stresses and lifestyle changes the pandemic brought with it. How can we support them when we can't understand what their experience was like and we find it difficult to remain in relationship?

That popular folk song of the sixties “We shall Overcome” should perhaps be “We shall undergo . . .” and what we shall undergo if we are faithful? I believe that we shall undergo **transformation**. And that transformation is also a slow process over time, which is why we need persistence to grow in God's kingdom.

What can help us, remind us, inspire us to persist in the face of hardships, lost battles, and discouragement?

Nature can help us. I think we need to spend more time outside. Deliberately, instead of only when we are moving from one building to another or from our car to a building.

When we sit down quietly surrounded by nature, we realize that nature persists and it needs our protection. It keeps on keeping on despite everything we have done to cover it up with cement and asphalt, pollute it, burn it, and mine it for its hidden resources (and not clean up after ourselves).

Because we are part of nature, we are part of the creaturely world, we are *humanly* creatures. Our bodies need to be in touch with nature. When we sit quietly by the river, we note that the river persists. We see that trees persist, weeds persist, insects persist, weather persists. Stars persist; animals persist. Psalm 1 compares our growth to a tree planted by a river, which yields fruit in season. While being reminded of nature's persistence, perhaps we can also contemplate the hidden persistence of our own daily activities: prayer, raising of children, education.

Community can help us. Continuing to come together allows us to encourage others who are struggling, or to gain courage from others when we are beaten down. Our community challenges us to replace cynicism with hope, to resist giving up, and to trust in God, not ourselves, to not depend on results, but on truth, to remember our heroes. What we do matters in our own lives and in the lives of others. Sometimes we are called to just show up – at church, rallies, council meetings, coffee dates, reunions. Someone said “The price of community is inconvenience” but how can I learn something different and be transformed if I don't show up?

We can help make safe spaces for people who are different from us, in age, in race, in economic status, in language, in ethnicity, level of education . . . for people with disabilities. When I first came to Spokane Friends, they

were celebrating paying off a very large loan for a complete remodel of the hospitality area to include an elevator! This meeting was way ahead of the city of Spokane in making a safer place for people with certain disabilities.

We can also make safe spaces for people to disagree with each other and still keep on loving each other.

Don't try to do everything. There are so many issues out there – climate, education, immigration, wars and rumors of war, political differences – no one person can be active in all areas. But that's why we are in community, so we can encourage others in what they are called to do. I want all animals to be well cared for – but wait, over there are Pam and Bill working with rescue dogs and with horses; I have a heart for children – wait, there are Don and Lorna, whose lives have influenced, and continue to influence, so many vulnerable young people; I want our children to have Christian education – wait, there are Lyn and LaVerne bringing special programming for our kids. And there is a high school principal whose professional life is devoted to addressing the educational needs of our teenage kids who lost so much during the pandemic. I want to help renew the earth – wait, there is Don who is practicing best farming methods There are dedicated counsellors, and lawyers, and social workers, builders, computer experts . . . I am surrounded by people who have found their particular niche in bringing God's kingdom to earth. Everyone doesn't have to do the same thing, but everyone has something they are called to do.

And as for the individual, so for our communities. No one community can address all the issues. Our community is called to participate in a

particular effort, but we are not asked to go it alone. We join with other communities in our neighborhood, our city, our state, it becomes a team effort. We do our small part, in the Sudanese community for example, as effectively as possible without worrying about whether we can see any results for our efforts. We will continue our efforts as long as we feel called by God, even though we know we may not live to see the fruits of our labors. Some people plant, others nurture growth, and still others harvest. Very few people or groups take part in the entire growing season, but each has their part to play.

And we trust in God, not in our efforts. We don't spend time worrying about results -- that's God's department. We take time for play, we take time for family. We take time for prayerful meditation. . . . And in the best of all possible worlds, our trust in God allows us to keep our sense of humor.

So I'll close by quoting some phrases from one of my favorite Scripture passages – the one from II Corinthians Chapter 4:

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. . . . Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. . . .¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

I will close by quoting part of a favorite hymn in which the growth of a more humane social structure is again compared to the growth of a tree.

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Each worthy cause with a future glorious
By quietly growing becomes victorious.

Thereby itself like a tree it shows:
That high it reaches as deep it grows
And when the storms are its branches shaking,
It deeper root in the soil is taking.

Be then no more by a storm dismayed,
For by it the full-grown seeds are laid;
And though the tree by its might it shatters,
What then, if thousands of seeds it scatters? *

*That Cause Can Neither Be Lost nor Stayed

Words: Kristian Ostergard. Trans. From the Danish by J. C. Aabreg

This message was given by Lois Kieffaber on June 21, 2026, during Sunday
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