

Sermon, July 24, 2022
Colossians 2:6-15; Luke 11:1-13
“Deeper: Persist”
Rev. Dr. Brian Jones, Senior Pastor



Memories are funny things. Some things in our lives we remember vividly as if they happened yesterday. Some things we don't remember because they didn't have an impact on us. Some things our brains will actually choose not to remember as a defensive mechanism to protect us. This happens quite often with trauma.

We remember, but what we remember is our version of the event even if it didn't happen. And, of course, we will swear that that's exactly how it happened. Probably because we have played that scenario over and over again in our heads until that narrative become for us, truth.

I think about how memory is a funny thing when I think about the memories I have of my grandmother, my father's mother. We only got to see her a few times a year, and she died when I was fairly young. I know my memories of her a mixture of what I remember stories told to me by family members and the like.

But there is one memory I know is true that I remember vividly is that she was a great cook. And she made a lot of food. That's a wonderful combination, isn't it? A lot of food that's really good. You don't want a lot of food that tastes bad and is a lot to eat. But you also don't want really good food that's so minute you hardly get to enjoy it.

She and my grandfather had nine children. And to help make ends meet, she worked as a cook in the school cafeteria. So she didn't have any small recipes. She didn't cook for one, I don't think she ever did

because she just assumed somebody would drop by to eat. And they did because it was plentiful and it tasted good.

She knew that flavor is important. It doesn't matter how beautiful the dish is, if it doesn't have any flavor, it's a failure. She would make fried chicken full of flavor, spices, herbs, to rival Colonel Sanders himself. My dad loved the flavor of her chicken and batter and spices so much he would often sneak into the kitchen and sneak a piece right out of the frying pan and put it in his pocket, go outside and eat it. Yes, the oil would burn his leg. But as I said, he had 8 brothers and sisters, and it was during the depression. You do what you have to do. Flavor is important.

I saw a video the other day of someone, I am sure she was a nice woman, frying chicken. But she used just water and flour. No salt, pepper, nothing, and she fried it. And the person watching this by the end is almost screaming **where is the flavor**. It looks nice but where is the flavor?

Flavor is important. It's why we add salt and pepper, it's why we add spices, it's why we marinate a nice piece of meat. Is it good by itself? Sure, but the marinade may tenderize, might let the enhanced flavor go deep into the meat itself. It will even bring out the flavors that are there.

It's looks nice, but where is the flavor. I wonder if at times God doesn't look at us as Christians or as the church and ask the same question. I mean, He did tell us we are the salt of the earth. We tend to add flavor. It seems, though, that we put so much importance on the presentation, on the outside, we may have forgotten the most important thing. I wonder if God ever looks at us and says *well, it looks nice*, but where is the flavor? Because the church can be many things, a home church, a cathedral, traditional, contemporary, big, one dear saint playing the same piano she has played for the last fifty years. The church can be many things, but one thing it ought not be is bland.

So how to find the flavor again in our lives or in the life of the church? Just like that marinade, we need to go deep. Staying on the surface will never add the flavor to our faith. If you want a faith that enhances that changes that's draw others, you have to go deeper. In this series, we want to look at what it means to go deep in our spiritual life.

In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus says we go deep by being persistent in our prayer life. Jesus tells us to keep praying about something until you have an answer. But why? If I pray to God and He knows my prayer, He knows if it's good or not, why do I have to keep praying? Why do I have to keep praying over and over again? I think if we were to ask Jesus that question, why must I be persistent in my prayers, Jesus would say to us, *my dear child, it was never meant to be about request and answer*. A prayer life that is just about our putting in requests and God answering those requests results in a bland faith. You can do that with Amazon or your Uber driver. But not with the Lord Almighty. God wants you to persist in prayer

because in that persistence you go deep, and when you go deeper, it's there you find the flavor that enhances your faith.

Why do we persist in prayer? The same reasons you marinate a steak. God wants you to continue in prayer because being in the presence of the Holy Spirit, constantly seeking Him tenderizes our spirits. I've never known a Christian who has deep prayer life who constantly brings things before God who doesn't have a tender spirit. You can tell. God will sometimes ask you to come again and again because He is more concerned with tenderizing your spirit than He is answering the prayer request.

Being drenched and covered by the Holy Spirit when we pray makes us more like Jesus. As we said last week, it's transformative. I want people to experience Christ in how I love, I want the love and power of Christ to come out in my life. And that won't happen if my faith is bland. Jesus wants us to spend that time with Him to bring that out. So keep praying.

Sometimes God asks us to bring our needs in prayer over and over because we are praying for the wrong thing. God doesn't punish us for that. Anytime we pray, it pleases God. But there are times when we pray and God holds off asking us to come again and again, as we do our prayer begins to change. We bring those things from a different perspective, we may have a sudden or subtle change in our perspective, and we begin to change. We may move from *God, help me deal with so and so* to *God, help so and so to see what they are doing is wrong to God bless so and so I know they are hurting and they need your love*. That only happens when we take the time to be bathed in prayer.

In truth, it can be a matter of timing. We pray, God is going to answer, but not for some time. But if we don't persist in prayer, how often might we forget we prayed at all? How many times might we miss God answering, moving in mighty ways, but we don't see it because we prayed once. But when you have to pray every day, when you are on your knees constantly lifting those things to God and then God moves at some point? Oh, then we get to witness and profess God moving. Have you experienced the blessing of praying something for years then seeing God answer that prayer? Those are the experiences that enhance our faith, cause us to grow deeper, that's a faith that isn't bland.

And honestly, God asks you to persist because, well, He loves you. Never underestimate the joy God has when we want to be with Him. He loves you, and He wants you to love being with Him. He doesn't want pray to be a burden. It's to be joyful to spend time praying. And when we seek to go deep, get more of the Jesus in that love? That's a relationship that will change your life.

This morning, if you have been carrying some burden and you have been praying and praying with no answers, don't give up. See the joy in the persistence, enjoy being with God. Allow Him to shape your

prayers, marinating in the Holy Spirit to tenderize and enhance your life. Persist, go deep, and your faith will be anything but bland. Amen.