The Hidden Virtue That Stands Behind Every Success

1. Warm up: The Biblical word for persistence is "perseverance." Jeff defined perseverance as stubbornly, faithfully doing all the small things day-by-day that are necessary to implement the big decisions we make – no matter how long it takes or how much we want to give up. Think of a time when you were a kid and your perseverance was tested. What happened? Did you give up or persist? What did you learn from the experience?

2. On Sunday we wrapped up our study of Bishop Budde's book *How We Learn to Be Brave*. Most of her book is devoted to talking about the most decisive moments in life, *i.e.,* those times when we make: The Decision to Go, The Decision to Stay, The Decision to Start, The Decision to Accept What We Do Not Choose, or The Decision to Step Up to the Plate. Although it's hard to make these big brave decisions, it can be even harder to sustain them. So in her final chapter, the Bishop focuses our attention on the necessity of perseverance. For guidance she points us to what Jesus teaches in Luke 18:1-8. Let's read that passage together, as printed on p. 3.

    a. In this passage, Jesus says that we should "pray always and not lose heart," then tells a story to illustrate what that looks like. Note how the woman in this story prays. Her prayer isn't just the words she speaks, "Grant me justice," but also what she does. She had to keep getting up, walking to the judge's house, pounding on his door, and boldly asking for justice. In other words, she put feet to her prayers. We're not told exactly how many times the woman had to keep coming back to the judge, but the story uses the phrase "continually coming." How do you think the woman felt on, let's say, the fifth time she came back to plead for justice? Or maybe the 10th time?

    b. What do you imagine motivated her to keep returning? Why didn't she give up?

    c. Can you think of a time when you were as desperate as the woman in our story for something to change in your life? What happened? What did you do? Did you persist?

    d. Bishop Budde says, "Perseverance is the hidden virtue of every courageous life [we observe]. Rarely do we see what it costs others to do what seems effortless [from the outside looking in]. Nor do we know what it took for them to carry on when they were tired or discouraged or to start again after failure or disappointment. Wherever we find ourselves in relation to the decisive moments that set us on our life's trajectory, perseverance is what enables us to keep going, even when we're stumbling the dark." Is there someone in your life who has role modeled what perseverance looks like? Tells us about them, and give an example of their perseverance.

3. Jeff said, "It's great to make big-brave decisions, but that's not what makes us successful. Lots of people make big-brave decisions that never amount to anything. It's all the little decisions that come after our big-brave decisions that determine whether something great will come from those big decisions. In a sense, the big decisions are easy. It's all the

little decisions that come after that require great grit and consistent courage that determine whether our big decisions will ever come to fruition."

a. Tell us about a time when you made a big-brave decision, but then lacked the perseverance to follow through. What kept you from persisting?

b. An unknown author once said, "Perseverance is courage stretched out." What do you think that means? What's the connection between perseverance and courage?

c. Why is perseverance so critical to our success in life?

d. How do you think we can grow our capacity for perseverance?

4. In Sunday's sermon Jeff highlighted three areas of life where it's critical that we apply Jesus' teaching about perseverance. One of those areas is the pursuit of social justice. He cited last week's amazing election results as an example.

   a. Keisha Lance Bottoms' election last week as governor of Georgia made her the first African American woman *in the history of our nation* elected governor of one of our states. Her election seemed to come out of nowhere and catch us by surprise, but in reality it was the culmination of 20+ years of arduous, tenacious, painfully persistent efforts by another key leader, Stacey Abrams, and all the nameless volunteers who rallied around Abrams to register 800,000+ new voters in Georgia and build a broad movement that finally broke through. If there are any black women in your Oasis, ask them how the election of Keisha Bottoms make them feel? If there are no black women in your Oasis, ask the other women in your Oasis how Bottoms' election makes them feel.

   b. Two years ago, powerful forces declared Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion dead. In last week's election, voters said, "No, it's not!" and voted to elect an amazing number of "first ever" candidates. Take a look at the list on p. 3. How do you feel about last week's election? And what do you think it teaches us?

   c. What's something you can (and will) personally do to keep persisting in the struggle for social justice?

5. A second area where it's critical that we apply Jesus' teaching about perseverance is with the personal goals God leads each of us to embrace. Jeff cited the historical example of Thomas Carlyle who felt called to write an epic history of the French Revolution only to have his 1200+ page manuscript burned by accident. Eventually his despair gave way to the determination to start all over again, and page-by-page one day at a time, he ended up creating one of the 19th century's greatest literary works. What's an important personal goal God has called you (or is calling you) to embrace? How's it going? In what ways is your decision being challenged? Are you persevering?

6. A third area where it's critical that we apply Jesus' teaching about perseverance is in our important relationships – with spouses, children, parents, siblings, significant friends, etc.

a. Suppose you were trying to explain to a young person why perseverance is critical to successful lifetime relationships. Based on your own experiences, how would you explain it to that young person?

b. Is there a relationship in your life right now that's testing your perseverance in ways large or small? If you're comfortable saying so, tell us who it is, why it's challenging, and what it looks like for you to persevere in that relationship. (If it makes you more comfortable you can hide the identity of the person and just speak of them in generalities.)

Remember: "Perseverance is the hidden virtue of every courageous life."

Luke 18:1-8

Jesus told [the disciples] a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. [2]He said, 'In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. [3]In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, "Grant me justice against my opponent."

[4]For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, "Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, [5]yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming."'

[6]And the Lord said, 'Listen to what the unjust judge says. [7]And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? [8]I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?'

Some of the Amazing "Firsts" in Last Week's Elections

First Black female governor in Georgia and our nation – Keisha Lance Bottoms

First openly gay male Senator in New Hampshire and our nation – Chris Pappas

First Muslim Senator in Michigan and our nation – Abdul El-Sayed

First Native American female Senator in Minnesota and our nation – Peggy Flanagan

First Latina governor of Texas – Gina Hinohosa

First Latino governor of California – Xavier Beccera

First Black governor of Florida – Byron Donalds

First female governor of Ohio – Amy Acton

First black governor of Wisconsin – David Crowley

First disabled Senator from Iowa – Josh Turek

First openly gay Congressman from Indiana – J.D. Ford

First black Speaker of the House ever in our nation – likely to be Hakeem Jeffries