

**October 16, 2016**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

**Sermon – “Don’t Give Up”**

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Anyone tired of the election rhetoric?

At the time Luke was writing his gospel account of Jesus’ life and teachings the followers were starting to feel discouraged.

They were tired of waiting for Jesus to return and finally bring all things to fulfillment, the deepest hope of their hearts.

They were tired of being persecuted as a tiny little minority in a great big, powerful empire.

They were anxious and suffering.

Today’s passage was written to provide hope, to send a message that God is well aware of our needs and will not forget us.

Luke was writing to comfort his people, not to urge them to nag God relentlessly with their petitions.

The main character in this story is described as a “widow.”

The Hebrew word for widow can be translated as ‘silent one’ or ‘unable to speak.’

We don’t know the widow’s complaint in this passage.

We are only told that she was persistent in seeking justice.

Scripture is replete with reference to treating widows with kindness and generosity.

Jesus often uses widows as the subject of his parables.

It seems that the judge in today’s passage relented out of annoyance, not empathy, but we really don’t know.

Perhaps his heart was softened by God’s holy spirit.

Perhaps in a time of morning prayer he heard God’s command to love his neighbor.

The preamble to the parable says: “Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.”

If we want to follow this instruction to ‘pray always’ we must first define what we mean by prayer.

Prayer, for me, defines a relationship with God.

That relationship can take many forms.

Some days I might pray by talking to God.

Some days I might pray by being silent.

Music is often seen as a vehicle for prayer.

Prayer is all the things that we do that bring us closer to God.

An act of kindness is a prayer.

When we continue to pray, no matter what, day after day, we signify our deep trust in God.

When we pray we signify our faith.

In his book, *The Heart of Christianity*, Marcus Borg speaks of faith as much more than simply believing the correct things in our head.

He says, "you can believe all the right things and still be miserable. You can believe all the right things and still be relatively unchanged. Believing a set of claims to be true has very little transforming power."

Instead, Borg speaks of faith as having to do with relationship, with giving your heart and your trust, your radical trust, to God.

He draws on the work of Søren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher, who said "faith as trust is like floating on a deep ocean. Faith is like floating in seventy thousand fathoms of water. If you struggle, if you tense up and thrash about, you will eventually sink.

But if you relax and trust, you will float."

He uses the example of teaching a child to swim and trying to get the child to relax in the water: "It's okay, just relax. You'll float, it's okay."

Borg describes faith as "trusting in the buoyancy of God.

Faith, he says, is trusting in the sea of being in which we live and move and have our being."

Today's passage is about God and what God has placed in our hearts.

Jeremiah tells us that God decided to write the covenant on our hearts so that we would not forget it.

"I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

(I believe that is the most beautiful line in scripture.)

God's covenant of love is written on our hearts.

It is part of who we are – every created being has this in their heart.

Surely God is attentive to our needs and wants what is best for us.

We pray to keep reminding ourselves of this.

We gather to worship to renew that covenant to fire up our hearts.

When we combine this awareness of God's love within us with the act of praying – living in God's presence, we cannot help but extend love to our neighbor.

In a recent post called “Loving Difficult People” Rev. Dr. Tom Tewell asked:

“Do you know anyone who is hard for you to love?

A family member? Your boss?

A colleague at the office?

A neighbor?”

He noted “If we're honest, we all know people who are hard for us to love.

And, if we're even more honest, WE are hard to love, too!”

He argues we only learn how to love when we have to love “challenging people.

We only learn how to love when we are stretched beyond our own human capacity, when we have to dip into our divinity.

When we ask God to help us to live out the covenant imprinted on our hearts, we most often are able to do it.

Relationships heal.

Forgiveness is granted.

Anger is set aside.

We have this enormous capacity to transform ourselves and our situations.

One of the joys of being human is the ability to change – to change destructive patterns in our lives; to change our minds about something or someone; to grow; to evolve.

We should not take this blessing for granted.

We are not trained puppies that have to do the same thing over and over.

Think of the changes that have occurred in your lifetime – what if you had refused to go along...

Imagine saying

“I’m not putting my clothes into a washing machine – they’ll get all tangled;

or I’m not taking a shower in hot water – I’ll get burned;

or my daughter would never marry someone outside of our faith;

or there is no way my grandchild could be gay;

or there will never be woman in my pulpit.

Friends, we are a resurrection people.

With God’s grace we rise up from the ashes again and again.

God continues to extend a radical welcome, forgiving our sins and offering us mercy and grace.

As we slog through the remainder of this election cycle, pray without ceasing.

Pray that God will grant us the strength to be a people of love.

Pray that we will be able to reach across divides and embrace our neighbors and friends with love.

Over 100 years ago Edwin Markham captured this in a poem.

“Outwitted”

He drew a circle that shut me out

Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout

But love and I had the wit to win

We drew a circle....

That took him in!