

**FAITH AS PERSISTENCE**  
Randall Tremba  
June 28, 2015  
13th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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**2 Samuel 1:1, 25-27**

*After the death of Saul, when David had returned from defeating the Amalekites in battle, David remained two days in Ziklag [although it could have been Charleston, SC]. And David cried out this lamentation over Saul and his son Jonathan. How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan lies slain upon your high places.*

Jonathan lies slain to which I might add: slain—not unlike nine good and beloved people slain at a Wednesday night Bible study.

**Mark 5:25-27**

*There was a woman who had been suffering for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak.*

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There is an extraordinary and amazing spirit of forgiveness in Charleston, SC, but there are also tears. The weeping and the hurting will not end for a long time to come, if ever.

See how the good and beautiful have fallen. See how those warriors of equality, liberty and peace lay dead on a church floor with no weapons in their hands other than mercy and forgiveness.

Susie, Sharonda, DePayne, Ethel, Daniel, Clementa, Cynthia, Tywanza and Myra.

Our nation weeps. Charleston weeps. Emanuel AME Church weeps the way David wept over his beloved friend Jonathan killed in battle, a battle fought with sword, spear and bow.

*And David cried out. How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan lies slain upon the high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me. How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished.*

But those weapons of war did not perish. They multiplied and escalated—more and more, bigger and bigger. David lamented the battle dead. He cursed the weapons of war. But David and his ilk take them up again and again believing that only violence can stop violence. Only violence can keep our homeland safe. Only violence can take back our country. Only violence can save us and bring peace.

At least that's what many believe.

And it is one kind of faith.

It's a faith hard to refuse when ISIS slaughters the defenseless or when a shooter has you in his sites. I can see why many have faith in violence to save and protect. It's a faith hard to refuse when a shooter pulls out a gun.

But that wasn't the faith of the nine murdered in Charleston. No one there was packing heat. As it turns out, those nine loved something more than life itself. They had their eyes on a different prize.

This evening the Shepherdstown community—whites and blacks and all shades in between—will gather at the Asbury United Methodist Church to hold a vigil of silence

and prayer. This is not the first vigil of this kind. We've done this before in other places, in other years. And we'll do it again and again and again and again. And again.

Working for peace, justice, equality, dignity and freedom for all peoples is a long, long, long road—just ask our LGBT brothers and sisters who have walked a long, long road often with bruised and bloody feet. It's a long road. Most days we can't see the end.

But we keep our eyes on the prize. We hold on. We remain faithful to the vision of the Beloved Community.

Dorothy Day believed in the Beloved Community. The late Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement, devoted her life to working for the homeless and the poor of New York City. She gave up a soft bed and slept on the floor. She stood up for women's rights against discrimination and was arrested and put in jail. She stood up for peace against war and went to jail.

Not much changed.

Poverty remained. Wars continued. Minorities were oppressed. Rights were denied. But she held on. She kept her eye on the prize. She understood faith as persistence.

"People say what is the sense of our small effort? They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time. A pebble cast into a pond causes ripples that spread in all directions. Each one of our thoughts, words and deeds is like that. No one has a right to sit down and feel hopeless. There is too much work to be done."

*Once upon a time a distraught man found Jesus and knelt before him. This is the gospel lesson for day (Mark 5:21-43). "My daughter is dying," he cried. "Please come and save her before it's too late." Jesus left immediately with the father. Many joined them along the urgent way.*

*Suddenly Jesus stopped dead in his tracks. "Who touched me? Someone just touched me," he said.*

*His disciples were perplexed and aghast. "Master," they said, "the crowd is thick. It could have been anyone."*

*Just then a woman stepped forward and said, "It was I. I touched the hem of your cloak." And then she told her story as Jesus listened.*

*"For 12 years I have suffered endlessly. I saw many physicians, spent all the money I had but just got worse and worse. When I heard about you, I said to myself, if only I can reach out and touch the hem of his cloak I will be well again. And so I did."*

And so she did. And thus it was that Jesus was touched—in more ways than one—by faith as persistence.

*"Go in peace," said Jesus. "Your faith has made you well."*

*Just then a messenger arrived from the house of the dying young girl. "Your daughter is dead," said the messenger to the father. "No need to bother Jesus anymore."*

The little girl was dead. Or so everyone thought—the way we often think the dream of the Beloved Community is dead. But Jesus held on to hope. He went on to the house, took the dead child by the hand and lifted her up, lifted her back into life.

I don't know if that really happened. But I know it's true. We have more life and love in our hands than we realize. And this is true as well: When we reach out in love, grace abounds.

Faith isn't a set of beliefs. Faith is practice. And it's persistence. We keep our eyes on the prize. We hold on. We keep walking together to build the land that God has planned where love, equality, dignity, justice, freedom, hope, forgiveness and peace shine

through.

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"Eyes On The Prize"  
(Traditional)

Paul and Silas bound in jail  
Had no money to go their bail  
Keep your eyes on the prize  
Hold on

Paul and Silas thought  
They was lost  
Dungeon shook and  
The chains come off  
Keep your eyes on the prize  
Hold on

Freedom's name is mighty sweet  
And soon we're gonna meet  
Keep your eyes on the prize  
Hold on

I got my hand on the gospel plow  
Won't take nothing for  
My journey now  
Keep your eyes on the prize  
Hold on

Hold on, Hold on  
Keep your eyes on the prize  
Hold on

Only chain that a man can stand  
Is that chain o'hand  
Keep your eyes on the prize  
Hold on

From the streets of Baltimore  
All the way to the Charleston shore  
Keep your eyes on the prize  
Hold on

The only thing I did was wrong  
Was staying' in the  
Wilderness too long  
Keep your eyes on the prize  
Hold on

The only thing I did was right  
Was the day we started to fight  
Keep your eyes on the prize  
Hold on

