

**New St. James Presbyterian Church**  
**Sunday, February 10, 2019**  
**Rev. Dr. David Thompson**

Leaping over the walls in your life!

Text: “By my God I can leap over any wall.” King David

Two candidates for political office scheduled simultaneous campaign rallies at either end of the same park of a small Ontario town. After a lengthy round of speeches, the candidates worked their way through the crowd--shaking hands, kissing babies and beaming mightily. Two retired farmers across the street were sitting on their porch in their rocking chairs, taking it all in.

Suddenly, the skies opened, and it began to rain. One of the candidates fled to take shelter in a nearby Tim Horton's along with half a dozen regulars. The other candidate, however, continued to move through the crowd--shaking hands, kissing babies, etc.

'That man's persistence yonder,' observed one of the farmers, 'sure makes it easy to know who to vote for.'

'Yep,' the other farmer agreed, 'Sure can't see myself voting for a man who hasn't the brains to come in out of the rain!'

Is there some obstacle in your life that you just can't seem to get past?

Perhaps for you it is financial. Perhaps you have lost your job and now the lack of money is getting serious. Perhaps for you there are some long standing issues that you can't seem to resolve with addictions, or relationships. There is anger about the way that person treated you and that anger just won't go away. Or perhaps for you it's that special person in your life who has cancer and you have asked for prayers, but one thing seems to go wrong after another, and you are at the far end.

What is it for you? What is the single most urgent obstacle that you think is blocking your happiness? And why can't you get rid of it? What do you need?

Now let's face it there are some things that cannot be changed no matter what we do. And the wise thing to do about those things is accept them immediately, however hard they may be. As the old prayer goes: “God, give me serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”

Refusing to accept the things that cannot be changed is to become **a victim** which is always worse psychologically and spiritually. So, don't go there!

No, I am not really talking about the things that cannot be changed but the blocks in our thinking that hold us back, the external circumstances that could in fact be changed if we could just get justice, or a lucky break, an insight or a connection to someone who could help us. For some reason we are blocked, and we don't really know why. Is that you today?

Perhaps for you, you have believed authorities who have said that you will never be successful at what you want to do. They have said: "You just don't have what it takes. You don't have the talent or the brains or the education you need to succeed." And this lies like a curse over you.

Do you know that this is a common problem even with people we know to be fantastic successes?

Consider this:

Albert Einstein did not speak until he was four, didn't read until he was seven. His teacher described him as "mentally slow, unsociable and adrift forever in his foolish dreams."

Henry Ford forgot to put a reverse gear in his first car and did not build a door big enough in his first garage to get the car out when it was built and the hole, he had to cut in the wall is still there today. He failed and went broke five times before he succeeded. Henry Ford said: "Failure is only the opportunity to begin again more intelligently."

The ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus said: "The greater the difficulty the more glory in surmounting it."

King David in the Hebrew Scriptures had enormous obstacles and challenges to face. I believe that David had what we would call an affirmation –one that he ran his thought life by. He would say over and over to himself when facing a difficulty: **"By my God I can leap over any wall!"** He did not let discouragement even come into his thinking. When a lion came after his sheep he didn't run, he killed it. When Giant warrior Goliath of Gath threatened Israel, David knocked the wall of his fears down with 'can do' courage and while Saul was still cowering in his tent, felled the giant with a slingshot.

Then of course there came naturally the wall of Saul's jealousy. Saul was an all- powerful king, David a mere subject. Saul was rankled by the women chanting "Saul has killed his thousands but David his tens of thousands". Yet David leapt over that wall to become king. He was a king with enemies on all sides, but he managed to survive and died in his own bed.

On the personal level he overcame the wall of his own arrogance and pride and sense of entitlement. He had committed murder and adultery, but he managed to repent and acknowledged his failures and recovered once again his stature in the eyes of his people. When he died, he had the greatest following of any King of Israel. Christ took his lineage from him and was called great David's Greater Son. What a life story! What recoveries from disaster after disaster to bounce back! What was it that kept David going? Was it just positive

attitude? Or was it something else... or a combination of things? The first words of our text are key to understanding David's success- "By my God... For David it was all about faith.

In the New Testament we came across the story of the widow before the unjust judge. In the time of Christ, a girl could be married off at the age of 13 or 14 years to an older man. So, it was not unusual for a widow to be young. There was obviously a just cause that needed to be addressed but the unjust judge did not care. He knew she had no money. She could not rely on the possibility that he would do the right thing. There was no compassion to fall back on. So, what was there for her to do?

Day after day she bothered this judge with her persistence, fulfilling the old farm saying that *in the confrontation between the rock and the stream, the stream always wins not by strength but by persistence*. Jesus seems then to be commending her persistence as a way of overcoming an obstacle.

Have we used persistence to overcome our problems? Are we as persistent as this woman was in getting what she wanted?

What is Jesus teaching here in this story? He is arguing that if an unjust judge will give us what we want how much more will God look after us! "I tell you," he says: "He will see that they get justice and quickly."

But if you are like me you might have a little trouble with this saying. You say "I have asked God repeatedly, but nothing happens. I have persisted and the obstacle remains."

If that is the case, then the last line of this parable might be just for you. It doesn't seem to fit with the rest of the parable. It is just a question: "*When the son of man returns will he find faith on earth?*" Now what on earth has that saying to do with the story of the unjust judge?

I think what Jesus is saying is this; *at the heart of every obstacle or challenge that you face it is primarily a question of faith if you are to remove that obstacle. The widow had faith in God as well as persistence and that is what kept her going. In David's case it was faith in God that was key. In other words, we need to add to our persistence; we need to add faith in God.*

So often we try to overcome things all by ourselves and we fail and fail and fail. Then we can give up and say, "This is the way it is, nothing is going to change." Now if that **is** about something that cannot be changed that is healthy to recognize that "it is what it is, and it is not going to change." When we get *there* spiritually, if it is an unchangeable thing, then we can get to peace **only through acceptance**. It is as the old prayer says that we need the wisdom to know the difference and then get busy changing the things we can.

I have two stories for you, both true. One about an atheist who became despite her doubts aware of the spiritual world that could help her. The other story is about an agnostic medical doctor who came to understand the difference that faith can make.

The first story is written up in a book called Expecting Adam by Martha Beck. She was a Harvard Grad, an atheist and someone who agreed with Albert Camus that the only decision left in a Godless universe was whether or not to commit suicide. But she had become pregnant with Adam and one night in great crisis, she awoke to discover that she was hemorrhaging badly. Her husband was away, and she could sense that her connection to the physical world was slipping away drop by drop.

At that point she began to notice **Them**. She said it was like watching rocks and stumps emerge from the sea as the tide pulls back. She said that she could not physically hear or see the beings in the room, but their presence was as real as oxygen. There must have been about 8 or ten of them standing in her bed room looking on with great concern.

“You guys” said this atheist, “Help this baby”. It was the first time she had spoken to them directly. She felt as she did so that she was crossing a fine but distinct line. She knew that she had to let go of what she had previously called her sanity. As soon as she asked them to help the baby, she felt a flood of warmth wash through her torso. The bleeding stopped instantly. And then feeling strange and awkward like Oliver Twist asking for more porridge she said, “please help me too”. For her this was one of the hardest things she had ever done in her thinking. This was after all irrational territory.

But the response was immediate A set of hands reached out to her like a father catching a falling child.

She writes: “Not only did I know that those incorporeal beings were there, but it was utterly clear to me **that the only reason that they hadn’t been helping me all along was that I hadn’t wanted them to.** They wouldn’t and couldn’t do anything for me until I asked. She felt very strongly that the one thing these beings would never do was override her will.

I tell you this story for this reason. You could be like Martha Beck and the problem might not be one of persistence at all, but it could be that you have never asked for help. You think at the most basic level that it is all up to you and so this obstacle remains in your path until you get desperate enough to get to the far end and give up. Only then can you be helped and only then if you ask for it.

What a lesson is there!! Are we perhaps too proud to let go and let God? Is that why the rock sits in the middle of our highway?

Dr. John Briley an agnostic kidney doctor had a 7-year-old boy as a patient called Jimmy. Jimmy had nephritic syndrome and it had not responded to any therapy Dr. Briley had tried in over 6 months. Briley was discouraged but he had not given up. But little Jimmy had a look of defeat in his eyes.

Briley’s plan was to administer Lasix a drug that was supposed to open up the kidneys. He had already tried Lasix and it had failed the last time. But this time he had a twist: a half hour

before he injected the Lasix, he would inject albumin, a simple protein that would draw water from the bloated cells into the bloodstream. Then when he injected the Lasix the water flooding the bloodstream **might flow** and open up the kidneys. The problem was if this didn't work then the lungs would congest until the body readjusted. Dr. Briley talked this over with the parents, and desperate, they agreed to try.

So, he put the albumin into the boy's intravenous line. A half hour later he returned to give the Lasix. Jimmy was breathing harder and looking scared.

Briley although not a man of any kind of faith himself, knew that Jimmy came from a very religious family, and so he asked Jimmy:

"You pray a lot?"

"Yes, I pray every night, but I guess God don't hear me."

"He hears you!" Briley replied not knowing whether God did or didn't, but Jimmy needed reassurance and belief. That much he knew as a doctor.

"Try praying as I give this medicine to you." he said. "I want you to pretend that you see your kidneys, (remember all those pictures I showed you awhile back?) well, I want you to picture them spilling all that extra water into your bladder. You remember that picture I showed you of your bladder?"

"Yeah" said the boy.

"Good! Start now. Concentrate on your kidneys."

Little Jimmy closed his eyes and concentrated and mouthed a prayer.

"What the heck!" Briley thought **I will also ask for help**, even although I know it won't work. In fact, he had a series of choice questions to fire off at God when his turn came to die, if there even was a God.

"How long will it take to work?" the nurse asked him.

"I drew her out of the room" says Briley and then said "With normal kidneys 20 minutes, 15 minutes tops. Stay with him. If he needs oxygen, I will be at the nurses' station writing all this down."

It was Christmas and O Holy night was playing at the nurse station.

Before Briley had scribbled one sentence of his notes the nurse poked her head out of the room down the hall.

"A half hour to work?"

"For normal kidneys!"

"Otherwise 15 minutes tops right doctor?"

"That's what I said."

"Well the floodgates have opened. He is urinating like crazy. Within two minutes he had filled the urinal and I have to go get another."

"Two minutes!" thought Briley, "Impossible!"

When the doctor got in the room Jimmy had filled the plastic yellow urinal. The nurse rushed in with another two. Jimmy grabbed one and started to fill that one too. Jimmy grinned at Dr. Briley and the light came back into the boy's blue eyes.

Dr. Briley left the room stunned. 'It just could not happen that fast. Medically impossible!' yet...

Was its sheer pharmacology and physiology breaking the rules? Was it the visualization?

But then from the nurses station he heard this fragment of the old Christmas carol that gave him goose bumps:

"Fall on your knees, oh hear the angel voices."

By God, Dr. Briley and Jimmy had leaped over their walls.  
And God can do the same for you today!