

**Homily – We Have a Persistent God**

**Rob Keim**

**October 20, 2019 – St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church**

Do you remember your first kiss?

Here is a poem by Indu KS to help you remember.

Close your eyes, sit back, and listen – so that you can remember your first kiss.

*We were 16,  
Summer days stretched before us,  
Boredom knocked  
far too often,  
Adventures lured us, but,  
weary bodies held us down.*

*We kissed for the first time,  
with  
Trembling lips,  
hesitant tongues,  
shy looks,  
lustful thoughts,  
nervous laughs,  
shallow breaths,  
Stupid questions,  
Can I kiss you?  
I want to kiss you.*

*You took forever,  
to kiss me.*

*Your eyes kissed  
me a million times,  
before your lips did.*

*You kissed me,  
Gently,  
Slowly,  
Under the staircase  
of your basement.*

*Your hands on my neck  
pulling me close,  
My hands around  
your waist holding on tight —  
both afraid to let go.*

*I always wondered,  
how people knew  
they were in love.*

*But when your lips  
touched mine,  
I knew I was home,  
and you smiled  
Because you knew too.*

Now it may be that you are not feeling a memory of your actual first kiss. Maybe it is the first kiss with your lover or with your partner. Maybe it is the person next to you.

*But when your lips  
touched mine,  
I knew I was home,  
and you smiled  
Because you knew too.*

You can open your eyes now – if you want.

Now, that sense of a first kiss is a feeling that God want to have with you as well.

Desire and longing are part of our tradition. The entire Old Testament book of the Song of Solomon are about the desire and longing between God and an unnamed person.

Hildegard of Bingen and Julian of Norwich are two of the most famous female mystics who wrote of their desire for God. And, today we most frequently hear of desire and longing in our church music. Both traditional hymns and contemporary praise music have a lot to say about God's deep and soul-filled love for us and our love for God.

Now, talking of God's desire and longing can feel odd to us for we typically overly intellectualize God's love. We limit it to rational thought, but it is really a deep, soul-filling feeling.

God is in love with you and desires you to be in love as well.

God wants you to be at home in God's eternal and unchanging embrace.

God is relentless in pulling you close.

But, most of us are relentless in turning away.

Today I want to invite you to turn back to the love of God that is already surrounding you.

That love is surrounding each and every one of us.

In today's Gospel reading that Susan read for us, we have the widow and the unjust judge. Like the parable of the neighbor knocking on the door, today's story is about persistence in prayer. The widow is tenacious, dogged and resolved. She is going to have justice, and though the judge has no interest in helping the widow, he finally relents. In this parable, we often see ourselves in the role of the widow, and we put God in the role of

the judge – though God is a good, loving judge. We are to be tenacious, dogged, and resolved in taking things to God in prayer. From our lived lives we all know that answers to prayer can take a long time, and sometimes we don't get the answer we want.

Be that as it may, God is the judge and we are the persistent widow. We are to be persistent in our prayers to God.

But, there is another way to look at this parable that fits into our memory of a first kiss.

As with any parable we can view ourselves in any of the roles, and today I want to ask you to look at yourself as the judge and look at God as the persistent widow. When we change our vantage point, when we are the judge in the story, then we are the ones who have no interest in God, the widow. We have no fear of God. We never give God a thought.

In the paper on Friday, it said that the latest survey results from Pew Research show that the number of "nones" continues to grow. These are the people who say that have no religion and the most recent surveys show that, including agnostics and atheists, the "nones" now make up twenty-six percent of Americans. These people have no fear of God and never give God a thought. These people could certainly be the judge in today's parable, but you and I still fit into the role of the judge as well.

I don't know about you, but there are large parts of my day in which I never give God a thought. And, there are often times when I do not act the way God is calling me to act. If I am being honest then I do not fear God and do not respect people. And, I suspect that most of us here today do not appropriately fear God or properly respect people.

Are you willing to take on the role of the judge in today's parable from Jesus?

So, if we are the judge, and God is the one who is being persistent, then this gets us to the feelings of a first kiss. God is tenacious in loving us. God is dogged in pursuing us. God is resolved to get our attention.

Isn't this the story of the Bible. The complete arc of the narrative told in Scripture is that God is tenacious, dogged and resolved to pursue us. And, to our regret, human beings are pretty persistent in continuing to turn away from God.

God desires us to feel the excitement and thrill of the first kiss, but we continue to say no to God.

Perhaps we don't feel lovable, or even love ourselves. You have a lot of heavy lifting to do if this is what keeps you from accepting God's love.

Perhaps we don't trust God's love to be enough. We might say that God is all that we need, but do we trust God enough that the bills will get paid or the problems will get resolved?

Perhaps our ego and false self is getting in the way of God's love. Do we need to be in control, be admired, feel useful, or be better than others?

These are just a few of the reasons that I turn away from God's love. What about you? Have you done the work to figure out your reasons?

Now, two thousand years ago, perhaps when humanity was finally ready for it, Jesus came as a baby boy. Jesus is the perfect union of God and human, and in ways that I don't fully understand, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus changed the universe forever and took away barriers between us and God.

Jesus is God's ultimate action to persistently reach out to us in love. God will go to any length to pursue each and every one of us. And, Jesus is the decisive, effective, and fundamental action by God to touch us. God invites us into God's embrace or into that first kiss.

Now there is one last aspect of God's relentless love that I want to point out to you. And, this is that there is nothing we can do to increase God's love for us, and there is nothing we can do to decrease God's love for us. God does not love us for what we do or what we do not do.

Using anthropomorphic terms for a moment, our actions may make God happy or unhappy, but they do not change God's love for us.

We may not deserve it, but it is God's mercy to keep reaching for us.

God is madly in love with each and every one of us.

That is the faith that we are called to believe. Know that you are the beloved of God. This is the faith that Jesus references at the end of today's reading. "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Will we be living into God's love? Will we be responding to God's love by being the hands and feet and voice of Jesus here on earth? Will we know that God's love is enough? Or, are you taking forever to accept God's kiss?

Have faith that you are the beloved. Feel the thrill of God's love for you. And, know in your heart that others are the beloved as well. Jesus love you. Accept God's love and desire.