

Carol M. Strickland
First Presbyterian Church, Athens, Georgia
October 9, 2016
6:30 a.m. AthHalf Pre-Race Worship
Text: Luke 11:5-9; 18:1-8

Rainy Weather

I thought a great theme for today would be the theme of perseverance. We all need perseverance whether it's running a race, mastering a new subject, parenting a child, getting any good at prayer, or fighting for things that really matter in life. So, like any good preacher I googled "perseverance quotations." I got a lot of laudable results like Samuel Johnson: "Great works are performed not by strength but by perseverance."

But then I got to thinking about Jesus. When he spoke about perseverance, he didn't give a serious sermon touting the virtue of steadfastness despite adversity. Instead, he told a couple of funny stories. He knew that people remember a good story. And, he had a sense of humor. Sometimes we take the Bible so seriously, we miss the fun. Like the two stories you heard--the friend banging on his buddy's door at midnight or the widow badgering the judge—we read them with a straight face when they could be Saturday Night Live skits.

Anyway, perseverance is a good thing, as we all know. So, in the spirit of Jesus let me tell you a Donald Davis story about his uncle's dog, a dog who persevere^d.

This dog was from a champion bloodline. His name was Rainy Weather. Frank Davis gave him that name because of the storm the night he was born in a barn in Iron Duff, North Carolina. Rainy Weather was a prodigy of natural fox-hound talent. Even before he could walk, he was smelling fox scent with all the windows and doors shut. Folks would say, "That pup can smell even with his nose taped up." He was so good, he never even had to be trained.

Frank and the other members of the Greater Iron Duff Fox Hunters' Association could hardly wait until Rainy Weather turned two years old and they could enter him into the National Fox Hound Championship up in New Jersey where they were sure he would win Mister Foxhound, USA.

Well, one day Frank and his field hand Clogger were in his old barn when a board gave way under foot. As they pulled out the rotten wood, lo and behold, clear as day, there were fox tracks imprinted in the dried mud. Frank knew those tracks had to have been made before that barn was ever built.

"Go get Rainy Weather," begged Clogger.

"Hounds can't follow tracks by sight," Frank said. "They go by smell. And those tracks have to be at least 60 years old."

"Pleeeeeease."

Figuring it couldn't hurt, Frank obliged. But as soon as Rainy Weather spied the old fox tracks, he yelped twice, jumped in the air, and jerked loose from Frank. Nose to the ground, Rainy Weather took off after that fox that had passed through Iron Duff sixty years ago.

Getting started was the hard part. Rainy Weather jumped into the hole, slithered under the floor boards, and when he got to the barn's foundation, dug under it until he emerged on the other side. He broke through to the corn field, yelping for all he was worth.

Frank stood there with his jaw dropped while Clogger whooped, "I knew he could do it!"

Rainy Weather was tearing up that corn field. He knocked down corn and flew dirt every which a way.

“Why’s he acting like that?” asked Clogger. “How come he don’t just run up and down the rows?”

“O, Clogger, that’s cornfield wasn’t there sixty years ago. That was all woodland. Rainy Weather’s having to run around all those trees like the fox did.

In a few minutes Rainy Weather had crossed the cornfield, broken out on the other side, and started smelling and yelping his way across the cow pasture. The dog would run straight for a while, then jump sorta sideways in the air, then hit the ground and run some more.

“How come he’s jumping around like that?” asked Clogger.

“I got it figured out,” replied Frank. “Years ago there used to be a fence row running through there. Tore it out when I made the pasture bigger. Rainy Weather is having to jump over where the fence used to be back when the fox jumped it. He’s following the fox trail right through the air.”

They got worried when Rainy Weather, nose to the ground, headed toward the Flat Field. Except Flat Field wasn’t there anymore. That’s where Frank had built the pond. But that didn’t stop Rainy Weather. He hit the edge of the pond and followed it straight to the bottom. Of course, they couldn’t hear him barking under water. But every few seconds little bubbles rose to the surface and when they popped, a bark came out of them.

From the pond, Rainy Weather barked his way up the cove and over the ridge until he was out of earshot. A good fox hound will stay on the trail until utterly exhausted. So it was no surprise when Rainy Weather hadn’t come home at the end of the day. Frank figured his dog would return the next day, but when he didn’t he got on the phone calling neighbors and even organized a search led by the members of the Greater Iron Duff Fox Hunters’ Association . But the dog had simply vanished.

Days, weeks, nearly three months passed. Then the phone rang.

“Is this Frank Davis of some place called Iron Duff, North Carolina? I’m the Baltimore chief of police calling to see if you have lost a dog.”

“Why yes, I have.”

“Listen, Mr. Davis. We got a call this morning about a break-in in a thrift store down by the harbor. When my men got there, there was no money taken, just this dog in the back of the store barking at an old, worn-out fox fur coat. He was so hoarse we could hardly understand him. We got your address off his collar. Do you want him back?”

“Of course I do,” Frank said. “He’s the finest dog I ever had. How do I go about getting him home?”

“Well, we checked into that. Trailways won’t take him. We’ll have to fly him back. It requires what they call a Sky Kennel and will cost \$486 dollars.”

“That sure is a lot of money,” said Frank. “How much does the fox fur coat cost?”

“Hold on. (*pause*) Well, the store owner here says he’s bought and sold that coat at least ten times. He’ll let you have it for ten dollars plus postage just to get rid of it.”

“Kathleen’s been wanting a coat like that for a long time,” was Frank’s reply. “I tell you what. I can’t afford to have that dog sent back, not for \$486. But I’ll send you the money for the fox fur coat. Just do whatever you have to with the dog.”

And so Rainy Weather went to the Baltimore dog pound and that well-travelled, well-worn fox coat went in the US Mail, parcel post, to Kathleen Davis.

About a week later, Frank heard a noise coming down the road. It was the mailman’s car and about twenty feet behind it was Rainy Weather, nose to the ground, still barking with every step.

Now that’s perseverance. Go and do likewise. Amen!

ⁱ Donald Davis, *Barking at a Fox Fur Coat*, (Little Rock: August House Publishers, 1990), pp. 13-29.