

“PATIENT ENDURANCE.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: Exodus 34:6-7; James 1:2-4, 5:7-8, 10-11.

Introduction.

Some of you may be wondering what happened to the fruit of peace. I have taken the liberty of switching the order of the Fruit of the Spirit so we could do peace next Sunday on Memorial Day weekend. I trust this doesn't try your patience too much.

The first fruit is love and the rest flow from it. So one of the aspects of love is patience. The first thing Paul says about love in I Corinthians 13 is love is patient. We can all testify it's pretty hard to be loving and impatient.

Patience is one of the aspects of godly or Christ-like behavior. We are all to have it and we all have a hard time maintaining it, so we need help. If you think a sermon on patience might be tough to hear, you should try preaching it.

Character of patience.

We have a word for short tempered, but we don't have a word for long tempered. But the Greeks did and that's the word translated in our Bibles as patience, or long suffering, steadfastness, forbearance, endurance.

Patience is the ability to endure inconvenience without complaint, or to accept irritating or painful situations. Patience isn't just about waiting, it is about how we act while we are waiting.

Scripture urges us to be patient in pain, with people, with evil, and with God. We are to be patient with the shortcomings, faults and failures of others. We are to bear with one another.

If patience is a fruit, impatience is a weed to be pulled out by the roots.

Impatience is a form of selfishness, it's seeking my happiness before others. Impatience can be as small as a long line at Safeway, a slow driver on the Hannagan, or as big as a disease or a debilitating handicap. It is as small as an interruption to the way you planned your day, to as huge as an interruption in the way you planned your life.

Impatience will lead us into a couple of temptations. One is to just give up, the frustrations or hassles just aren't worth it, whether it's waiting on hold, or a trip or a job or a marriage or even our life. Another temptation is to double down and charge ahead without consulting God.

On a small level, I do this by changing lanes and ending up in a slower one, on a larger level I start making phone calls or figuring out how to manipulate the system in my favor, rather than dying to my selfish ways and desires and resting in God's timing.

Patience of God.

Like all the fruit, patience is rooted in God's character. God is love and God is patient.

Numerous texts describe God as slow to anger, long tempered.

Exodus 34:6-7a The Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ... forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.

God doesn't have a hair trigger or quick temper. He is exceedingly patient and slow to anger. God never seems to be in a hurry. Consider how long God waited to send Jesus, and how long it has been since Jesus.

God doesn't have a microwave, only a crock pot. He doesn't have any microwave recipes, no three easy steps to righteousness. God uses great patience to bring about much repentance.

Is not God's patience toward us, God's love toward us? Is there any greater expression of God's love than His patience and forgiveness? Are we not called to imitate His example?

Obstacles to Patience.

Being time conscience impacts our ability to bear the fruit of patience.

Patience is related to time, our attitudes and understanding of time and our bondage to time. Patience is especially difficult to cultivate in the soil of our current culture.

Time used to be kept by a seamless flow of seasons, lunar cycles, and sunrise and sunset. Now it is kept by hours, minutes and seconds with mechanical devices that help us segment, schedule and manage time.

Time becomes my time and my time is valuable, so I don't want anyone to impede my progress or waste my time. We won't be patient with others if we see time as our own private possession. I want to control it. I am one of the most patient people I know as long as no one is impeding my progress or interfering with my plan.

Intrusions and trials and interruptions are viewed as obstacles to patience.

Time consciousness makes us impatient with ourselves. I always think I will get more done in a day than I do. How often have you thought, "If only I had more time I could ...?"

How many of us keep to do lists and check things off to feel productive? How many of us feel anxiety over this or impatience with ourselves?

How many of us are time conscience during worship? How often do we check our watches? Do we start feeling impatient after 11:30?

Why are we time conscience during worship? Does this feel unproductive to us? Are there more important things for us to be getting on with? How can we joyfully and thankfully engage in worship, when we are mindful of other things to do?

Our culture puts a premium on speed.

With speed come greater and higher expectations, and therefore greater impatience.

Fast food is no longer fast enough, now we order ahead.

Instant coffee is too slow, now there is Keurig.

We can get anything from Amazon in three days.

Have you ever paid extra for a fast pass at Disney World?

I have a Nexus card that lets me use the TSA Pre-check line. It is like pure gold.

We are the only culture that drums our fingers impatiently in front of the microwave. Is anything worse than slow Wi-Fi or internet?

In a world about speed we are increasingly losing our ability to be patient, which will inevitably lead to more fights on airplanes and in lines. Speed works against patience and fosters impatience.

I googled patience and found two sites offering easy steps to patience, one was twelve steps, the other one was five steps. Guess which one I chose? Who has time for twelve steps?

Our drive for immediate gratification.

We want what we want when we want it, which means now. I want to walk in the door at 6 o'clock and sit down with a fork in my hand. And no that attitude is not working well for me.

If something is broken or wrong we want it fixed now.

Like slow check out people, people who keep us waiting, someone who doesn't respond quickly when the light turns green, people who drive under the speed limit, people who take forever to line up a putt, kids or cows that don't seem to have any sense of urgency.

There are people who are destination people, and any place in between is a waste of time. There are people who are journey people, who stop and enjoy the sites along the way.

Which is more important? Your view of time and sense of patience may dictate the answer.

Our culture has made an idol out of *efficiency and competence and productivity*. I become sinfully impatient with inefficiency and incompetence. It's a form of pride.

This creeps into our personal relationships and Christian life. Cultivating the fruit of the Spirit takes time, a lot of time, but we want it now.

Cultivating Patience.

Cultivate patience by abiding in Christ.

All godly character grows out of Christ-likeness and Christ-likeness grows out of a relationship with Him. Any hope of increasing in patience depends on us abiding in Christ, as branches connected to the vine.

Patience takes strength, more strength than we have, it takes the power of the Holy Spirit. To have it you have to ask God by His Holy Spirit to give it to you.

Colossians 1:11 May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy.

Patience is not passive, not meekness, it is strength, a controlled response in a tough situation. A quick temper is a sign of weakness, of not being able to control ourselves.

Cultivate patience by considering the patience of God. As we come together each week to worship God, remember what kind of God He is. A God who uses 40 years in a wilderness to teach trust and obedience. A God who becomes incarnate and then lives 30 years before revealing Himself. A God who walks three miles an hour for three years. A God who never seems to be in a hurry.

There is something liberating about having a God who isn't in a hurry, who moves at a different pace, who sets us free from the tyranny of the urgent.

There is something liberating about viewing time not as a scarce commodity we have to cram as much into as we can, but as a gift to be enjoyed, to be received gratefully and employed for the sake and benefit of others.

Cultivate patience by waiting on the Lord.

Psalm 130:5 I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope.

Isaiah 30:18 The Lord waits to be gracious to you ... blessed are all those who wait for him.

Patiently wait on the Lord by praying old prayers, prayers that last decades.

Cultivate the fruit of patience by giving Sunday more of a special place in our lives. Sabbath pushes the world's view of time and activity aside for one day a week to remember that we aren't in control, that our frenetic activity isn't the only work in the world or what will save the world.

God rested from His labors and so should we.

Patience is cultivated through trials and tests. Problems produce patience when encountered with grace and faith.

James 1:2-3 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

Trials themselves don't make the patience, they are the instruments God uses to make it. We learn long suffering endurance in hard or painful trials. Patience doesn't grow in the tranquility of the harbor, but comes out of stormy seas. God messes up our plans to conform us to Christ. We can resist it or we can trust His grace to be sufficient and rejoice in His purposes.

Cultivate patience as we grow older.

The senior years are a season especially challenging to our patience. With age comes all kinds of tests and afflictions. This is the season of life we are more acted upon than acting. Retirement is when we stop doing and start being done to.

When Judas handed Jesus over to the authorities it was the first time in Gospel when Jesus was passive, when he is acted on. From that moment until the resurrection most of the verbs are passive, Jesus being acted on, mocked, spit on, cursed. Jesus experienced what we experience, a passive season of life.

Jesus patiently waited on the Father, this season was just as important as the times of taking charge. As the great poet reflected, "They also serve who but stand and wait" (John Milton).

Cultivate a godly character in response to whatever is done to you, by God or others. Turn this season into a season for of patiently trusting God.

Patience is cultivated through forgiveness.

Colossians 3:12-13 Put on ... patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you.

Is not God's patience toward us, God's love toward us? Is there any greater expression of God's love than His patience and forgiveness? As God has showed patience with us through forgiveness, so show the patience of God with others through forgiveness.

How can we be impatient when God has been so patient with us? Don't find fault, find forgiveness. Forgive just as the Lord forgives our many sins against Him.

Cultivate patience by being quick to repent every time you are impatient. This develops a clearer sense of our own sinfulness, it develops humility and honesty about ourselves and it slowly kills this sin and breaks its hold on us.

Reflect on your past week. What made you most impatient and why? What was so important to you to elicit that kind of reaction? Be quick to repent to God and to those we have been impatient with, and ask the Spirit to give us His grace and strength to be patient.

Cultivate patience by bearing with one another for the sake of our unity.

Ephesians 4:2-3 ... with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

To be a community of sinners gathered in one place week after week will require patience. Patience with walkers in the aisle, patience waiting for the bus, patience with little mistakes or errors in the bulletin, patience with imperfection or people who take your pew or parking spot.

Our unity here is more important than our petty differences or offenses or irritations and frustrations with each other. Bear with each other in love.

Consider the fruitful benefit of having a ***time of prayer and Scripture each day*** as a way of reorienting your attitude toward time. It is a way of slowing down and acknowledging that God is in control and our time is not ours but His. Invite God into your time, into your schedule and calendar. Rather than bowing to work and time, bow to the God of our work and time.

Cultivate patience by deliberately slowing down, take the long way home, or instead of driving, walk some place, make time for a visit, hang out with your family, bake some home-made bread, or make some home-made ice cream, the slow way.

Baptizing four babies last week and doing two funerals should remind us of how fragile and fleeting life is and how quickly we come to the end of our days. Birth and death are reminders that our time on earth is a gift from God and He numbers our days. God is not in a hurry.

Cultivate patience by imitating those who are patient, like farmers or Job.

Hebrews 6:12 ... imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Finally, be patient with yourself and with others as we seek to grow in the Spirit and in the fruit of the Spirit. There are no instant fruits. No farmer expects seeds to turn into fruit producing plants over night or even in a month. It is a journey of a lifetime, a long slow obedience in the same direction by grace through faith.