

SEEING THE GLORY—PATIENCE

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2 Luke 9:28-36 March 3, 2019

As I begin writing this message on Friday, the sun is streaming through the window in my study. It is “a beautiful day in the neighborhood” and that warmth feels good. Yet I know that snow is predicted for the weekend and I can not predict how that will affect us. But the unknown and the uncertainty does not stop us from being faithful so I write this in that spirit, trusting in the Holy Spirit’s presence in my life and yours and in our churches and our denomination.

The past few weeks I have been preaching from a sermon series developed by Rev. Kerry Greenhill titled “From Glory to Glory: Following the Spirit from Epiphany to Transfiguration. She commented at one point that as she began working on the series she discovered that she was delving into the Fruits of the Spirit. So we have been doing the same!!

The Transfiguration was a moment of seeing God’s glory for Peter, John, and James. It is a revelation of Jesus’ closeness with God and his divine purpose, the presence of God with him and the glory of God at work in and through him. Yet it is not the fulfillment of Jesus’ purpose; that comes with the cross and the empty tomb, the birth of the church and the work we all continue as the Body of Christ. So we practice being present to each revelation of God’s glory (in ourselves, in other people, in the world around us) while we wait and work for the fulfillment of God’s reign.

Did you catch that last phrase? Let me repeat it—“...while we wait and work for the fulfillment of God’s reign.” It’s that word WAIT and to be able to do that we need PATIENCE!!! How many times a day do we find ourselves needing patience and praying the Lord will give it to us RIGHT NOW?!?!?

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS...PATIENCE. Patience means: bearing pains or trials calmly or without complaint, manifesting forbearance under provocation or strain, not hasty or impetuous, and steadfast despite opposition, difficulty, or adversity.

What we have failed to recognize is that the Lord has been patiently waiting to give us patience long before we even thought about asking for it. God doesn’t have to try to be patient—He is! I’m so thankful that He is patient with us through all of our ups and downs, our ins and outs. Of all of the fruit of the Spirit, it’s easier to joke about patience than it is to become a patient person.

Before we get too far into this study, I need to make a confession. I am not an expert on this subject. I'm still learning. It's still a process over which there is a lot of struggle going on. Patience is something I have to keep working on, too. Too often there are conflicting feelings inside where I might understand the situation but I just want it fixed NOW! So if you understand this perhaps we will be fellow learners, fellow travelers. All of us are still in search of more patience, especially how to develop a harvest of fruit called patience. The benefits of developing patience are more than worth the process and pain. So let's explore this ongoing process together as fellow travelers.

Have you learned of the Chinese bamboo tree? The Chinese plant the seed; water and fertilize it, but the first year nothing happens. The second year they water and fertilize it, and still nothing happens. No sign of life bursting through the earth. The third and fourth year they water and fertilize it...and sometime during the course of the fifth year, in a period of about six weeks, this bamboo tree grows to a height of approximately 90 feet!

The question is: Did it grow 90 feet in six weeks or did it grow 90 feet in five years? The obvious answer is that it took all of the five years because without the nurture and care of the preceding period of time, there would be no tree.

Now another question: When does a person develop patience? At the point of new birth? How long does it take to cultivate this fruit to maturity? What does it take to make the process happen?

The special application of this quality of character is most often exhibited in our dealing with other people—relationships. Perhaps it's easier to approach this from the negative side. Lack of patience can poison relationships and too often ruins what would otherwise be wonderful and maybe even brilliant personalities. We understand the opposite of patience is temper, shortness with other folk, and very destructive to long-lasting relationships.

When dealing with patience, we all must acknowledge it is the little things that seem to drive us to despair. The enemy of our souls doesn't often concentrate on the big battles but continuously pounds away at the little things. Because we are prepared to handle the big things, we fail to recognize the continued erosion going on. The unknown poet of the following has captured our threat and dilemma:

I thought, if defeat came at all,

It would be in a big, bold
Definite joust
With a cause or a name,
And it came.

I had not thought the daily skirmish
With a few details, worthwhile;
And so I turned my back upon them
Year on year; until one day
A million minutias blanketed together
Rose up and overwhelmed me.

As we go through our daily lives patience can seem like an elusive pursuit! Just think of all the little enemies we deal with on an everyday basis that do all within their power to destroy any little sign of patience we might have or have attempted to cultivate. It's the nature of patience to seem that the cultivation of the fruit of patience is almost impossible! We find this out in a hurry when we attempt it on our own. Without the help of the Spirit at work within us it is so difficult to achieve. But we shouldn't despair! There is hope! Real hope! It's found in the Word of God.

When Paul writes about this, the word "long-suffering" may have been more appropriate in his case. It could best have been defined as "endurance" in all situations. *And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: **BEARING FRUIT** in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that **YOU** may have great endurance and **PATIENCE** (Col. 1:10-11).*

Phillips Brooks has captured the essence of Paul's challenge to his readers with these words: "Do not pray for easy lives; pray to be stronger men. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers; pray for powers equal to your tasks. Then the doing of your work shall be no miracle, but you shall be a miracle. Every day

you shall wonder at yourself, at the richness of life which has come to you by the grace of God.”

Have you ever been in a situation, in a strange place,, where you are required to look for road signs as well as study a map to decipher where you are going? Did you drive slower than some of the native drivers? Did they honk at you, shake a fist, or worse, yell at you because you were going too slow? Or perhaps they are just wondering if your GPS isn't working correctly? Sometimes...the going in the Christian life can be slow because we are entering into new territory. If we have walked down a particular valley and someone else is going through the same kind of test or trial, why can't we be more patient with them? It works both ways. Sometimes, perhaps too often, our responses to others are not as wonderful and godly as they should be. The Christian walk takes time to take care of others. It doesn't mean that we are not making progress...but we do it deliberately.

TEACH ME, LORD, TO WAIT

Lord, to wait down on my knees
Till in Your own good time You answer my pleas;
Teach me not to rely on what others do,
But to wait in prayer for an answer from You.

They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength,
They shall mount up with wings as eagles;
They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint.

Teach me, Lord, teach me, Lord, to wait. (Stuart Hamblen)

Just because you are waiting, exercising patience, doesn't mean you are passive. On the contrary, patience can be very active...when exercised. It's a concentration of strength. It's more than simply enduring. It's a discipline at work moving us to a point that God has in mind. It's a robust, vigorous kind of thing being built on the fact that God is patience as well as being love.

Now I find myself out of time again and so I will close for today. But since I still have a few more things to share about patience I will do part Two of my message on Patience next Sunday. I hope you will have the patience to wait on me for that!

The 2 Corinthians passage has provided the theme text for this series: “we all see God’s glory “as though reflected in a mirror,” and we are all “being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.” And because this is “From the Lord, the Spirit,” and therefore “we do not lost heart.” This speaks to me of our creation as humanity in God’s image, seeing God in one another, seeing that God is transforming all of us into the image of God in Christ. But unlike the mountaintop moment with Jesus, for us it is a life long process of being changed “from one degree of glory to another”, that is, in Wesleyan language, the work of sanctification is not instantaneous but gradual.

As we reflect on this time after the 2019 Special General Conference, we do so with patience and waiting with hope as the Lord continues to be present in our lives and in our hearts and minds. The Holy Spirit is transforming all of us into the image of God in Christ and that is a blessing that we don’t deserve but is freely given! May we wait in trust and obedience for His guidance, wisdom, and love for our futures to unfold and for the Movement of the Spirit in our individual lives and in the United Methodist Church !! Amen and amen.