

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"The Power of Patience"  
Dr. J. Dent

July 15, 2007

Patience toward me in coming. Stacy could finish her grade. I could finish in BC. Sandy Sutherland could come and do good interim ministry for eight months or so. Many good things I trust have happened because of our collective patience.

Patience toward me in ministering here. I may try your patience. I may not even remember your name... a terrible sin for a pastor. Have you ever noticed that the people you care about most are those who try your patience most?

Patience as we face the future and more importantly the present together. We will have many times that will try our patience collectively and individually.

Patience in the Scriptures:

- I. God towards people
- II. People towards people
- III. People towards themselves

God is exceedingly patient. It is a part of his character. It is something he wants to teach us, and instill in us. God was patient and rested after creation was finished. He was patient when Adam and Eve sinned. He was patient when Noah lived and fulfilled his call. It was God's patience that Abraham was interceding to bring forth in reference to Sodom. It was his patience that Moses was interceding to bring forth in reference to the Israelites running after idols in the desert. It was his patience that kept David as king, and Solomon even though they gravely sinned. It was his patience that finally in the fullness of time brought forth Jesus Christ his Son as Redeemer, who patiently endured the cross and the taunts of the religious leaders and the crowds. He gave us the Holy Spirit and reminded us that love, joy, peace, **patience**, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control are the attributes that God exhibits that he also wants his people to exhibit.

Now you've probably said to yourself, how is God showing patience since many of the examples I've given are followed by judgment. God's character is that of the father searching for his child, just as in the story of the prodigal son. That teaching of Jesus is much more about the character of God than about the styles of rebellion of the children. The heart broken seeking his children God of the Bible is the one who has great patience. There are judgments. There are limits. Jesus is coming again. But meanwhile we live in an era of grace and mercy. But the patience of God is expressed to us today so that we might turn to him and surrender our lives to him. Grace is there for us to turn our full devotion, our full ambition, our whole lives over to him.

The good news is that we can choose today to receive that grace, change our minds about our lives and trust God as never before. This requires us to acknowledge our character flaws, such as our impatience.

I am often impatient. I wish it were not true. I am impatient with others when they don't understand me or don't understand something I am saying which I believe is clear. I am impatient when I see injustice (even more so toward myself). I am impatient with those I love. Some of this comes from a desire to see something made right immediately. Some of this comes from immaturity. Some of this comes from impatient self-talk.

What is impatience? It is the inability to conquer the urge for immediate gratification, or what we experience when we live with two year olds (or others who can act similarly). This is commonly expressed by, "No!" "Now. I want it now!" Never! Of course this position can be much more subtly expressed, as in the prayer "Lord, I need patience, and I need it now!" Do you know that you won't be able to change your anger or impatience or whatever it is without God's help? Have you ever tried to make yourself more patient? "I can make myself more patient, I can (gritting teeth)!"

Patience is positively expressed towards others in listening, caring, seeking their interests before our own and serving. This is not to say that the patient person never challenges or disagrees with others, or that patience and passivity are synonymous. Paul encourages young pastor Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2 to:

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great **patience** and careful instruction.

Patience often accompanies wisdom. The Proverbs (29:8, 11; 30:33) tell us that anger expressed inappropriately leads to quarrels and broken relationships. It is not that anger is bad, it is one's expression of anger that can characterize a person as foolish. What gets your goat? What turns your crank? What makes you boiling mad?

Often it is some character flaw in someone else that we ourselves have and will not or cannot admit or even see.

This is often evident in our self-talk. Our self-talk is what we say to ourselves to motivate ourselves, to reflect on interactions with others, to establish or re-establish our personal identities and for many of us, simply to remember what we are doing. Do you ever find yourself going up or down a flight of stairs only to ask yourself why you have gone where you have gone? But that's another story.

In our self-talk, we can be quite degrading, quite demanding, quite hurtful. Often we will replay the tapes of our childhood where we received messages of "you're not good enough," "you're ugly," "you're stupid," etc. When we do so, we reinforce the negative self-concepts given to us by parents, siblings, friends, relatives, co-workers...you name it.

What we need to consciously do is reinforce the kindness, grace and love of God shown to us in Jesus Christ as we admit the sins, flaws, problems and challenges of our lives. We need to meditate on the promises of God in Scripture, the truth about ourselves as the loved ones of God, the forgiven ones, the ones who receive mercy and show mercy... I find Christian music which uses the words of Scripture a helpful tool for meditating on the promises of God. I hope you avail yourself of the myriad resources of music available to you in this regard.

Now what does all of the above have to do with today's Scriptures, which are from the revised common lectionary? First of all, thanks for your patience in this regard. I'll try to quickly address some of the points made in these passages, from Deuteronomy 30, where God says his commandments are NOT too hard for us to follow.

And here we pause again and say we know that our tendency and our nature is to go against God. The tendency of our culture is to go against him.

That's why we have assaults here in this city on Circular Road this last week and some of us don't feel safe. That's why we feel outrage when government officials or anyone in places of responsibility fall down in their duties and put people's health, even their lives, at risk. But God says we can be people who choose to trust him, who choose to change, who choose to agree with him, who choose to admit their sins and imperfections rather than pretend that we have it all together.

That is choosing life rather than rebellion against God and death.

In Psalm 25, it means being teachable, open and willing to perceive from God's point of view, to transform culture rather than be transformed by it, to humble ourselves before God and give him time. In our present culture, the biggest challenge is where we spend our time, whether we feel we have a lot of choice in how we spend our time or not. Our time reveals our hearts. If we say we love someone but don't spend time with them, do we truly love them as we say? If we say we have no time for God, for the church, which is God's vehicle for connecting with humanity, no time for the Bible, no time for prayer, what do we have time for? What we have time for shows our hearts, shows our priorities, shows our inclinations, and indeed shows our devotion, or in fact what/who we worship.

What amazes me about the Good Samaritan is not that he does something good, or that he gives money to the guy to take care of him and his wounds, or even that he was a Samaritan and was not supposed to even care. What surprises me is that he took the time to turn aside to help. We're supposed to be surprised that the other two guys didn't turn aside. But that's normal, turning aside, not taking the time to help. What's extraordinary is that this guy takes the time out of his busy schedule to help. Now you might say he was on holiday, and the others were just trying to get to appointments, important appointments. Or you might say that he was unemployed and had extra time to do so. Or you might say that he had the first aid courses to properly deal with the issue, or was bold enough to confront the wounds and the nakedness. But really, his choice to take the time showed his heart. And that was what Jesus commended.

Time and timing is what patience is about. Seeing the big picture and choosing the long term view of things makes us able to fend off immediate gratification, whether that gratification is of anger or of sin, we can find in Jesus the patience to deal with the situation, to deal with the person, to deal

with the church, or the church leader, to deal with the community, to deal with the job, to deal with the family, to deal with the friend or supposed friend...you fill in the blank.

What does God have on your plate to increase your patience? Think of one thing, if you can. If you can't, ask someone close to you what they think is in your life for the purpose of increasing your patience. Have you got that one thing? Offer it to God. Symbolically hold out your hands to God with the relationship, with that situation, with that challenge and give it over to God.

Some time in the near future, this church will be planning what we will focus on, what we will choose to excel in, of all the options of various ministries, because we can't do it all. The question is: What do you think we should be doing as a church? What is your part here?

God can do amazing things through us, not because we are so amazing but because God is in the business of amazing us with his grace and power.

I'd love to talk with as many of you as possible this summer and this coming year about your thoughts. Many of you have been here a long time, some of you not so long at all. No matter how long you've been here, I'd appreciate hearing what you have to say and any insights you might have for me. I expect to be visiting the sick and dealing with crises. But I also hope to see many of you in your homes, or in your places of work for a few minutes just to get to know you. Of course this is only with your permission and creativity in scheduling. And I can't get to know everyone equally, but I certainly can try to spend a little time with as many as possible. If you'd like to see this happen, you can call the church office and leave suggestions on when to meet. I'll take your response as a measure of your desire to make time to talk.

I know it's the summer. Isn't it good? There is no pressure in this. Only hope and desire for the best for us together as we head into the future for the glory of God and the wonders of what he can do here.

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Let us pray.