

Fruit of the Spirit: Patience Colossians 3:12
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Oak Grove Presbyterian Church March 17, 2019

(Bill stays seated for one minute.)

There. I gave you a chance to practice patience.

Patience is our fruit of the Spirit for today. Again, in Galatians we read these words from Paul: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” These qualities all become manifest in our lives as we turn over control of our spirits to the Holy Spirit, God in the present tense. The more we “die to self,” using Paul’s words, and let the Spirit of Christ live through us, the more we exhibit these wonderful attributes Paul calls the “fruit of the Spirit.” Don’t we all long for these, to be people who are known for our love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control”?

Patience.

A farm boy accidentally overturned his wagon-load of corn in the road. The farmer who lived nearby came to investigate. “Hey, Willis,” he called out, “forget your troubles for a spell and come on in and have dinner with us. Then I’ll help you get the wagon up.”

“That’s mighty nice of you,” Willis answered, “but I don’t think Pa would like me to.”

“Aw, come on, son!” the farmer insisted.

“Well, okay,” the boy finally agreed. “But Pa won’t like it.”

After a hearty dinner, Willis thanked his host. “I feel a lot better now, but I just know Pa is going to be real upset.”

“Don’t be foolish!” exclaimed the neighbor. “We’ll get that wagon back on its wheels in no time. By the way, where is your father?”

“Under the wagon.”

Today is St. Patrick’s Day, true or false? True! Let’s have a little St. Patty’s Day quiz.

St. Patrick was Irish. T or F? False. He was British; hauled off to Ireland by marauding warriors who made him serve as a slave, before he escaped six years later.

The color originally associated with Patrick is green. T or F? False, St. Patrick's blue.

Patrick's original name was Sucant. T or F? True.

The fruit of the Spirit we might well associate with Patrick is patience. T or F? True!

In honor of St. Patrick's Day, let me tell you a bit about him. For six years in slavery he worked as a shepherd, mostly alone, cold, miserable and lonely. Though only nominally a Christian previously, he began to pray, thanking God for preserving his life and praying for a way to return. Eventually he was able to escape and return to Britain, where his family rejoiced and begged him never to leave them again. But he felt the call of God, and traveled to Gaul, present-day France, and moved to a monastery where he was mentored in the faith by a man named Germanus. At the age of 28, Sucant was ordained a deacon and took the Christian name Patricius, or in English, Patrick, meaning "fatherly."

About then, while meditating on scripture he had a vision from God. The Irish pagans were in misery beckoning to him, "We beseech you to come and walk among us once more!" He was thunderstruck! Return to the heathen Irish who had enslaved him, robbed him of some of the best years of his life?

Many months waking and sleeping, he wrestled with the call. He said it was his own Garden of Gethsemane. Then came the day he knelt as Jesus had done, and prayed, "Nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done."

Yet, for fourteen years he remained in the monastery of Auxerre praying, fasting, studying, sharing the vision for Ireland. Fourteen years of preparing. Does that ring any bells? Patrick took comfort in remembering that following Paul's conversion he took a full fourteen years of quiet preparation before Paul ventured forth on his first missionary journey. God is a very patient and thorough preparer. At age 42, Patrick set off for Ireland. He did not meet with immediate success, but eventually he was able to share the gospel with many of the Irish kings and chieftains, who brought their subjects along with them into the fellowship of the church.

T or F. The symbol of Patrick in Ireland is the four-leaf clover. False.

The shamrock, a three-leafed plant. (slide #5 of shamrocks) One of the kings Patrick was trying to teach about Christianity was puzzled about the Trinity. How could God be three and at the same time one? Patrick reportedly plucked one of the shamrocks at their feet and explained how it had three leaves, but was one plant, so, too, God had three aspects—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—but was one God.

Moving on from Patrick.

Patience. In my own faith journey I have a tendency to be impatient sometimes. I have found it helpful to pray about the timing of things, so I can be on God's timing, not ahead of it.

And not behind it.

There are two different words in the Greek, the language of our New Testament, that are translated *time*. There is *chronos*, meaning the ongoing progress of the clock, second after second, hour after hour, day after day. We get the English word "chronology" from *chronos*. The other word is *kairos*, which means "God's time," or "God's timing." The right time to act.

Has the Church sometimes been guilty of being too patient?

1800 years to get rid of slavery might be an obvious example, don't you think? The treatment of women, of LGBTQ folks, and so on...

Remember that definition of "meekness" that I have shared with you a few times? In the beatitudes, Jesus says, "Blessed are the meek..." Meek is not a word we generally like very much...But "meek" is not a helpful translation of that biblical word. The Greek word is *praus* and one of the definitions of a person who is *praus* is one that is never angry at the wrong time...and always angry at the right time.

That's the essence of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, *Letter from Birmingham Jail*. Let me refresh your memories. King, Ralph Abernathy, and other civil rights leaders had been leading protests and demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama, despite a judge's order forbidding such gatherings. In the spirit of nonviolent civil disobedience, they continued to gather and were roughly arrested on April 12, 1963, and thrown into jail.

A group of eight white Alabama clergymen issued a statement known as "A Call for Unity," essentially saying that King was trying to rush things and ought to slow down.

This infuriated King and he wrote a lengthy and inspired response from jail. Let me share a few excerpts. King wrote:

One of the basic points in your statement is that the action that I and my associates have taken in Birmingham is untimely. Some have asked: "Why didn't you give the new city administration time to act?"

...We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward gaining political independence, but we still creep at horse and buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, "Wait." But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim;...

when you take a cross county drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" and "colored;" when your first name becomes "nigger," your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John," and your wife and mother are never given the respected title "Mrs. ;" when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodiness"--then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience.

We need the same kind of impatience in the fields of climate change, opioid deaths, and gun violence, true national emergencies.

May we each of us as individual followers of Jesus, and as members of larger bodies of the faithful, always seek to discern the Spirit of God and God's kairos timing. May God grant us the patience to accept what we cannot change and the impatience to change what we cannot accept.