

Patience
Galatians 5:22-25
James 5:7-11

Westminster Presbyterian Church
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June 27, 2020 (Q16)

Galatians 5:22-25

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

James 5:7-11

Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Indeed we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

This summer we're talking about the fruit of the Spirit, the things we should look for, to see where the Holy Spirit is at work in the world. They are the things we should strive for in our own lives, in order to be working with the Holy Spirit.

Last week we spoke about peace, and we contrasted the world's flawed *Pax* with God's *Shalom*. This week we're speaking about patience.

I don't know about you, but patience is not something that always comes easily to me. It is something that at times I have to work on. And I don't think anyone enjoys practicing patience, do we?

Of course not!

"Practicing patience" is a euphemism for, "Not getting what we want, when we want it."

I am convinced that patience is a virtue more praised than practiced in our modern world.

If used to be that we wanted everything fast. Fast cars. Fast delivery. Fast food. Fast results. Fast company. “Faster, Better, Cheaper.”

Now fast isn’t good enough. We live in a world of “instant coffee, instant tea, instant pudding, instant cereal, instant dislike.”¹ We want instant motivation delivered by instant messaging so that we can get instant gratification. If we missed something, there’s always instant replay.

But is there?

No offense to people who choose to drink instant coffee, but it is not the same as the real thing. Likewise, tea-drinkers tell me that there is a world of difference between instant tea made with a teabag and brewed tea, made with loose leaves. So-called instant motivation usually lasts about as long as it takes to create. And there’s no instant replay for a toddler’s first steps, or a marriage proposal, or a loved one’s last words. Once they have happened, they have happened.

James is writing to people who are expecting to get what they want, now. Many people in the early church believed that Jesus was going to return from Heaven and end the world literally any day now. They regarded every day they spent without that happening as wasted time.

He tells them to be patient. He points out how a farmer plants the seeds, and then waits patiently for the crop to grow. He tells them that the Lord is near, something that is still true today. Jesus did not abandon the early Church, and Jesus has not abandoned us.

¹ Charles M. Schulz.

James tells his readers to look at the Old Testament prophets who spoke in God's name. They told the people that the Messiah was coming, but none of them lived to see it. Until the last of the Old Testament-style prophets, John the Baptist.

They had to be patient, because God was doing something amazing in the world, literally world-changing. Just not in the time frame that they fervently wanted it to happen.

We, too, have to be patient.

As Christians who live after the Resurrection and before the Second Coming, we have to wait. While Jesus told us that no one knows when the Second Coming will be,² it is very unlikely that it will be in any of our lifetimes.

Christians have learned over the years to live with not knowing. We've learned to do the work of Christ in the world in the meantime: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and the prisoner.³

Using the gifts that God has given us, and working patiently to make this world a better place overall than it was when we were born. Not just better for ourselves and our biological children, but for everyone. We've been doing that all of our lives, just like our ancestors in the faith.

We probably won't ever see this world perfect, but that's okay. As Doctor King said, "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."⁴ The world is better in our time and for more people than it was a century ago, and much better than several centuries ago. There

² Matthew 24:36, Mark 13:32. This calls us to some humility in any claims we make about eschatology.

³ Matthew 25.

⁴ Rev. Doctor Martin Luther King was quoting the Unitarian minister Theodore Parker, "Of Justice and the Conscience," in *Ten Sermons of Religion* (1853).

are still places and circumstances in the world where life is, “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short,”⁵ but those places are fewer than they were even thirty years ago.

And we will see the end, when the Kingdom of Heaven has fully come on earth, when every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.⁶ That makes it easier to be patient.

We have to be patient about other things, too.

The coronavirus pandemic has not gone anywhere. There is no vaccine, and it will likely be a while before there is one. We will likely need to be wearing masks in public for months to come, in order to control the spread of the virus. That’s not a political statement. It’s a realistic statement of the science.⁷

But this, too, shall pass. It may pass like a kidney stone, but it will pass.

So what do we do in the meantime?

James tells us to, “Be patient, therefore, beloved.”⁸

And Paul adds, “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”⁹

⁵ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651).

⁶ Philippians 2:10-11.

⁷ Data available at <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/home>. The idea that masks are a political statement is a dangerous fallacy.

⁸ James 5:7.

⁹ Colossians 3:12-14.

I pray that we would all do this. If we do, we will find that the little things we do add up,
and become the big things.

Amen.