

Patiently Waiting
Second Samuel 5:1-5;9-10
2 Corinthians 12:1-10
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September 29, 2024

Fred was on his way home from work one Friday afternoon. He had had a hard week and was anxious for his weekend to begin. Traffic was unusually heavy, and he tried to wait patiently but he sat through two light changes before he made it to the front of the line. With the next green light, he was set to go. The light turned green. Fred stepped on the gas and his car stalled. He tried to start it, but all his efforts failed. Meanwhile the light went from green to yellow to red, and green again then yellow and red. By this time a chorus of honking horns was sounding behind him.

Feeling just as frustrated as those other drivers who were just as eager to get home as he was, Fred finally got out of his car and walked back to the first car behind him and tried to cut a deal. He said "I'm sorry. I can't seem to get my car started. If you go up there and give it a try, I'll stay here and blow your horn for you."

I'm not sure how this turned out for Fred, but I don't recommend trying to make this same deal today.

Patience in the middle of frustrating events is a hard commodity to find. It almost seems to be a forgotten virtue.

I'm old enough to remember when 'fast food' was something new. We went from there to overnight delivery of items to fidgeting when our high speed internet doesn't seem to be quite high speed enough. It's no wonder that when we are forced to wait on anything or anyone, we easily become anxious, frustrated or angry.

Our world, our culture moves at a rapid pace. God, on the other hand, seems to have no problem with being counter-cultural when it comes to time. The God we worship has his own view of time and doesn't seem to be at all concerned with how impatient we may become in waiting. God's ways are not our ways the Scripture reminds us and like it or not very often we are made to wait upon the Lord.

David learned what it meant to wait upon the Lord. If you remember, God had told Samuel to anoint David as king when David was just a boy. David was out tending sheep one day when Samuel showed up and declared that David was destined to be king. There was just one small problem. Israel already had a king – King Saul. So, David became a leader of Saul's men of war which led to another problem. David turned out to be very good at this job, so good in fact that the people began shouting "Saul has killed his thousands, but David has killed his ten thousands." That probably would not be the best campaign slogan today but back then it seems to have worked.

The mightier David became the more jealous Saul became until Saul stopped fighting his enemy the Philistines and instead concentrated on hunting down and killing David. David was forced to flee into the wilderness and live as a fugitive with a price on his head for years. For almost twenty years David was pursued by Saul. 20 years. That's a long time to patiently wait for a promise from God to come to pass. 20 years of believing in God in spite of the odds. 20 years of continuing on course, learning and practicing the skills of leadership. 20 years of trusting God would make good on his promise.

Eventually Saul died on the battlefield and David took over as king. However, his waiting was still not over. David is first welcomed as the king over the southern tribes of Judah, but the northern tribes are still under the control of Saul's sons. It would take another 7 1/2 years for all the tribes to come together and for David to set up his reign in Jerusalem.

The years of wilderness living, waiting for God's promise to be fulfilled provided many learning opportunities. Reading through the psalms attributed to David gives us an insight into what David learned in regard to his relationship with God. In just one of those many psalms, Psalm 37, David writes "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret over those who prosper in their way, over those

who carry out evil devices.” It seems that David learned that life is not always fair and the call of the faithful is to live with the promise of God for our lives, no matter the challenges encountered and no matter how long we are made to wait for the fulfillment of God’s promise. David learned to seek the Lord’s counsel, to move in the Lord’s time and not to rush to take matters into his own hands. It takes a long time to build a faith like that. In times of adversity and testing faith can grow stronger when one continues to trust in God’s promises and to move in God’s time, and never to give up hope in God’s promise.

Just like David, Paul knew this. Three times he asked God to remove a thorn from his flesh. We don’t know what that thorn was – we only know God’s answer to Paul was “You must learn my grace is sufficient for you, you must learn that my power is made perfect in your weakness, you must learn to operate according to my time and my plan and not your own.”

Just like David, Paul learned. He learned what it meant to be weak, to have insults hurled at him, to endure hardships and persecution. Both David and Paul had to learn patience while they persevered in living out the call of God on their lives.

David and Paul are not the only stories in our Scriptures that demonstrate how God’s people have had to practice patience. Abraham and Sarah waited years for their miracle child. The Hebrew people wandered for 40 years in the wilderness before coming into their land of Promise. Israel endured years of exile in Babylon. As a people Israel waited centuries for God’s Messiah to come and walk the streets of Jerusalem.

I believe there is a lesson to be learned from all these stories of waiting and one of the lessons is learning how to practice the lost virtue of patience. It’s not always easy to do, especially if we try to learn patience all on our own. We need each other to help us along the way, to remind us again and again and again of God’s faithfulness to carry out the promises God has made. We need to hear the stories of the faithful in Scripture and in the building of the church again and again. We need to hear each other’s voices in telling our stories of how God has been faithful in our lives when we have encountered challenges that are frustrating or frightening. We need to come together in worship, to be in God’s presence so that our anxious bodies and minds and souls can be calmed and strengthened.

And we need to remember that waiting times, when patience is required, are not ‘down’ times when all progress grinds to a halt. David grew and became strong in his time of waiting. Paul persevered in his call to build faith communities in spite of never having his thorn in the flesh removed and because he persevered the Word of God was spread. Waiting times hold within them a gift of learning God’s grace is sufficient. We grow in faith as we practice not just patience, but also practice what we know and believe is our call to be disciples, our call to be followers of Christ in the building of God’s kingdom come on earth as in heaven.

Trinity is in a time of waiting and patience will be required. The good news is that it will not take 20 years of more to call a new pastor although at times, it may seem to be taking a long time for this to happen. Trinity’s waiting time is not ‘down time’ however. Instead, active patience is required because you see the work of the kingdom never ends while we wait. There are lost souls to be found, grieving people to be comforted, hungry people to be fed, prayers to be offered for peace and healing for our world.

Your Session has already been hard at work to begin the process of finding a pastor to lead this congregation in this waiting time. At the same time they are committed to keeping on with the good work of ministry that takes place here. Today we will elect more leaders who have answered the call to step out in faith. The Session needs your prayers for the work ahead. Trinity needs more than prayers, however. This church needs all of the congregation to be willing to say ‘yes’ when asked to help whether that be in labor or in leadership or committee work or giving. The church needs your presence in worship and fellowship, in sharing both the burden and the joy of life together.

In this waiting time the God of hosts promises to be with Trinity. Trusting in God’s promised presence and plan Trinity can further God’s kingdom in this time and in this place, even in the waiting time. May it ever be so. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen