

## **Homily – The Spiritual Practice of Patience**

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**December 11, 2022 – St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church (8am only)**

Today, on this third Sunday in the season of Advent we traditionally celebrate and remember Mary, the mother of Jesus. So, I want to begin with the story of another mother. Shortly before Covid, I went up to the Bay Area, to Menlo Park, to baptize two eleven-week-old twins. The babies are the children of one of my best friends, and she had me baptize them since her church does not baptize infants. That church wants a person to wait to be baptized till he or she can do their own profession of faith. But, Melinda did not want to wait.

Melinda has spent a lot of time waiting. At forty-seven years of age, she decided waiting for the right man to have a family had taken long enough. So, Melinda adopted two fertilized eggs from a mother who had already had a successful pregnancy, and had them implanted. Nine months later she was the mother of twins.

Melinda said that the pregnancy went fine, but that forty-seven-year-old single mothers were not meant to stay up through the night taking care of two babies. However, she has no regrets. She had been patient long enough, and she is very happy.

Many, if not all of us, know what it is like to be patient, though sometimes we are not as good at it as we would like to be.

Wikipedia defines “patience” (or forbearing) as the state of endurance under difficult circumstances. It can mean persevering in the face of delay or provocation without acting in annoyance or anger. Patience is also used to refer to the character trait of being steadfast. Antonyms or opposites include hastiness and impetuosity.

In psychology, patience is studied as a decision-making problem, as people make choices between a small benefit in the short term or a larger benefit in the long-term. Over and over studies have shown that people tend to pick the short-term rewards over the larger long-term rewards. We just don't want to wait.

And, I don't know about you but sometimes it seems like we are getting less and less patient in twenty-first-century America. When I was still working in the corporate world, there was often an expectation that I would respond to emails and texts at any time of the day or night, including weekends. We want instantaneous communication that often leads to instantaneous decision-making. Impatience has taken over.

How do you feel about being behind a slow driver, even when the other driver is five to ten miles an hour above the speed limit?

How do you feel about waiting ten minutes to be seated in a restaurant, and then wait another ten minutes to have your order taken?

Or, how do you feel when you have to wait a few minutes on the telephone for customer service? Do you lose patience at two minutes, ten minutes or thirty?

With these questions, have I just upped the stress level for some of you? It does for me.

Now, I know that sometimes patience is actually the wrong reaction to something.

Sometimes a delay is due to laziness or complacency. Sometimes we need to light a fire, and push to get something done. So, impatience can be a good thing.

But in general, I am going to make the bold statement that patience is still a virtue. Patience is still good. Patience is still something that we should strive to get better at.

Historically, patience has been included in the list of seven heavenly virtues. These virtues include chastity, temperance, charity, diligence, patience, kindness, and humility. This is a list that was created back in the fifth century, and practicing these seven is said to protect one against the temptations of the seven deadly sins.

Again, the seven virtues are chastity, temperance, charity, diligence, patience, kindness, and humility. Last week I talked about this last one, humility, and this week it is patience.

Now, each of the world's great religions insists that patience is a virtue. In Judaism, patience in God is said to aid believers in finding the strength to be delivered from hardship and the difficult things that are inherent in the physical life. Notice I didn't say that patience keeps bad things from happening, but instead it helps alleviate the grip that pain has in our lives.

Within Islam, patience with steadfast belief in Allah is called sabr. Sabr is one of the best virtues of life in Islam. Through sabr, a Muslim believes that an individual can grow closer to God and thus attain true peace. Isn't that something that you want? Don't you want to grow closer to God? Don't you want to attain true peace?

In Buddhism, patience is one of the "perfections" that one trains in and practices to realize perfect enlightenment. Now, the Buddhist concept of patience is a bit

different than our English definition of the word. In Buddhism, patience goes a step beyond enduring a difficult situation. In Buddhism, patience refers to not returning harm. It is the ability to control one's emotions even when being criticized or attacked. This is an ability that seems to be in short supply these days. I think that we could use a bit more self-control. We could use a bit more forbearance. We could all use a bit more patience.

Patience, in Hindu philosophy, is the cheerful endurance of trying. It is also the capacity to endure opposites - such as pain and pleasure, cold and heat, sorrow and joy. This seems to be similar to our Episcopal or Anglican tradition, in which you learn to live within the tension of two sides. Jesus often taught that the world is not black and white. Instead, it is many shades of gray.

Finally, within our Christian tradition, patience is seen as a gift of the Holy Spirit to those who have opened themselves up to allowing God in. When we are patient we are living into the nature that God has created in us. For Christians, patience includes the concepts of forbearance, long-suffering, and the willingness to bear wrongs patiently. Patience is a characteristic that improves the way we are in community with one another. It strengthens our relationships with one another and minimizes the stressors that often cause friction between people.

In the Bible it is written, *"With patience a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue can break bones."*

And it is written, *"if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."*

And, *"Those who are patient stay calm until the right moment, and then cheerfulness comes back to them."*

It is written, *"Accept whatever befalls you, and in times of humiliation be patient."*

And, *"Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer."*

And here is one we often hear at weddings. *"Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant"*

And, in today's New Testament reading from the letter of James we heard, *"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."*

For anyone on a spiritual journey, patience is a virtue that:

- Draws us closer to God
- Removes barriers that we often have with one another
- Allows us to make better decisions, and
- Minimizes pain especially when the cause of the pain is still with us.

Patience is an incredibly important part of spiritual development. So, if you want to go deeper in your relationships with God, others and self, you are going to have to allow patience to be a frequent part of your everyday life.

Of note, I believe that patience is a by-product of other things. In my own experience joy is a by-product of gratitude and thankfulness, and patience is also a by-product. It is a by-product of those spiritual practices that let God in to one's head and into one's heart. It is a by-product of those things that help one move their focus away from self.

Patience is a by-product of the spiritual practice of solitude or intentional alone time.

Patience is a by-product of the spiritual practice of silence. The first step of silence is to turn off the TV and radio. The second step is to silence your own voice and the voices of others. The spiritual practice of silence forces one to slow down.

The spiritual practice of prayer can also be an enabler of patience. Prayer gets you outside of yourself and connects you to God, the source of patience.

The service of others can also help enable patience as it allows a person to practice moving focus from self to others.

And finally, the spiritual practice of submission can dramatically help with an attitude of patience. Submission is a primary practice in Islamic spirituality, but it is also an important practice for Christians. When one learns to give up control, and even give up power to others, then one is removing a major barrier to healthy spirituality. It is another way of getting outside of oneself.

There are other spiritual practices that can help a person grow in patience, and always remember that patience is a by-product of letting God in and getting outside of oneself. God is always with us as we muddle through our life's journey, and through the Holy Spirit God give us the gift of patience.

And, I think living in a calm, nice place like San Luis Obispo County helps as well. After a long wait, my friend Melinda is blessed with her twins. And, patience is a

blessing we all have from God. In this season of Advent, and beyond, may we all embrace our opportunities for the virtue of patience.