

Sermon: July 21st, 2019- Fruits of the Spirit Sermon Series: Patience and Gentle Strength (The **Power** of Prayer)

Let us pray, WE have come together this day, O God, to be present with each other in this community of faith and love. We have come to be present with you, to quiet our minds and hearts and ponder your Word anew in our lives. I would ask now O God, that the words of mouth and meditations of all of our hearts, would be acceptable unto you our redeemer. Amen.

I heard a story once about a kindergarten teacher, who saw as the other children from class ran outside for recess that one of her students was struggling to put his boots on. He finally asked for help and so she knelt down and with her pulling and him pushing, they struggled together to get him ready to go outside. By the time the second boot was on, the teacher had worked up a sweat. She also whimpered when the little boy said, "Teacher, they're on the wrong feet." She looked and sure enough, they were. After struggling to pull them off, she managed to keep her cool as they worked together to get his boots back on this time on the right feet. Then he announced, "these are not my boots" too which she bit her tongue rather than screaming why didn't you tell me that to being with.

Again though, keeping her cool, she managed to pull off the boots. He then said, “these are my brothers’ boots. Mom made me wear them because mine had holes in them.” This poor teacher didn’t know whether to laugh or cry, but mustered up the strength to put the boots on his feet again. Finally, the boots were on and he was ready to go out for recess, however before he ran out the door the teacher stopped him and said, “wait you need your mittens, where are they?” looking back at her he said, “I stuffed them in toe of my boots so I wouldn’t lose them.” I am 100 percent certain we have all had an experience or day like that. A time when you needed every ounce of patience you had and likely a little grace from God to get through whatever it was that you were facing.

But this teacher models for us today two fruits of the Spirit as described to us by St. Paul in his letter to the Galatians; Patience and something I have come to call gentle strength. If you have ever gone through a situation like that, or even just listening to it, you might ask yourself, how did she do it? Or how did I manage to get through that without absolutely going ballistic? The answer is she had patience, patience with the child and importantly patience with herself, but equally she had an inner gentle strength which held her attentive to the moment and enable her to see a way forward through all the frustration.

According to the dictionary, Patience (and this hands down has to be one of the worst definitions I have ever found) is the capacity or the habit of being patient; which requires a little more digging. To be patient is the ability to bear some form of pain, or tribulation, or annoyance calmly and without much provocation. Essentially patience is the capacity to remain calm and collected while facing an annoying or hard experience.

Now of course, because we are human and because there are few moments or experiences that you can simply frame as being either black and white, the levels of patience each of us has for certain things can be different. We have all heard someone say “I just don’t have the patience for that” that statement doesn’t mean they don’t have any patience, it simply means that for whatever reasons that one thing they eluded to, they simply cannot stay calm and thus respond to it in a positive way. Maybe think about your own life. What things are you more patient about than others?

As child I was incredibly impatient when it came to waiting. It didn’t matter if I was waiting for my birthday to come or waiting in a Doctor’s office, I was incredibly impatient if I had to wait. I wanted whatever it was that I was doing to happen fast, to happen right now; let’s just get it over with. And still to this day I

struggle with having to wait, I am better than what I was, I absolutely can wait now still to a certain degree whether it's waiting in line, or waiting for a seat at a restaurant, or waiting for a package to come in the mail, I don't have as much patience when it comes to waiting, then I do in other areas of life when I am incredibly patient.

All of us, in some form or another has some level of patience. What I think we also have is a deeply rooted strength, but I was concerned to just use the word strength, because often when someone says strength we instantly think about muscles or the ability to lift heavy objects and though some people can indeed lift a great amount of weight, the gentle strength that I am referring to, is an inner strength that enables us to face some incredibly tough situations and yet find a grace within us to move forward.

Maybe you have met someone who seemed meek and mild, likely wouldn't last a second in a boxing ring, and yet carried themselves in such a way that no matter what situation they faced, they found a way to move through it, not always quickly or without hardship, but eventually they find some way of moving forward. To me that gentle strength is a thousand more times important than

whether you can lift heavy weights, for this gentle strength offers us all a way of finding God grace in every moment.

Of all the fruits of the Spirit that we have been looking at over the last couple of weeks, Humility and Compassion and Kindness which is next week, the two today, patience and gentle strength, are maybe the most interesting, at least to me, of the five. You may recall that the question I have been looking to answer over the last couple of Sundays', is not entirely how to live these Fruits of the Spirit, though that has been part of my reflections, but more importantly, when St. Paul talks about how Fruits of the Spirit as characteristic of a life of faith, I want to know how exactly does our faith encourage, inform and teach these ways of living?

Effectively what I want to know is how our faith informs us or enables us to respond to the world like that teacher from the story? And why I say that these two are the most interesting to me, is that even though I think we can all learn to be humble, kind and compassionate people by working hard on the lessons Jesus taught; what I believe is that within all of us is a base level of patience and gentle strength and so instead of needing to learn how to find those fruits of the Spirit in our lives, what we discover is that Jesus actually offers us a way to exercise that

fruits of spirit, and he does so through a standard practise of any faithful life which is the practise of prayer.

In the passage that we read today from the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is not only modeling a practise of prayer, but he also gives his disciples some words to use while praying. No doubt you will note that these words form some of the lines of the Lord's prayer that we say together each and every Sunday. Yet following those words he goes on to teach a lesson about persistence by showcasing a man knocking on his neighbour's door in the dead of night looking for food to share with his guests. Jesus then goes on to say something that is a bit of a point of contention when it comes to prayer for many people, Jesus says, "persist in asking, ask and shall be given, knock and the door shall be opened. Continue to ask, continue to look, continue to knock...for surely God knows to give the Holy spirit to those who have asked." For many this passage is a point of contention and in fact the practise of prayer becomes such as well, because we have all prayed for things that didn't come to pass. WE have all asked for things and are still waiting for the answers, we have knocked on the door and the door has not always been opened. So, what's the deal?

But I would like suggest to you today, is something that was shared with me a long time ago by an Anglican Priest who was leading a seminar on Prayer.

During that seminar she was describing a number of different prayer practises, and kind of like Jesus did in the Gospel today, was offering some wording for prayers that she found meaningful; but then she said something that has never left me. She said, "You know so many people come to me and ask, why hasn't God answered my prayers? Why hasn't God changed what I have asked God to change? If God is not listening or willing to respond then what is the point of praying? And my response is always the same, the practise of Prayer, as shown to us by Jesus, is not about changing God, its about being open to God changing us."

I have always liked that, that prayer is about enabling ourselves to be changed by God. And in my experience the two biggest changes that come upon me when I enter into a practise of prayer, is that I gain patience for whatever situation I am praying about and I nourish the gentle strength within me that holds me and carries me through it. I think that is why patience and gentle strength are indeed important fruits of the Spirit, because they nourish us, and when we open ourselves to be changed through prayer, the time that is spent offering whatever it is that we need to offer to God, the change that comes is that we gain patience and an inner strength to have the foresight not to be given the

answer by God, but to act in the ways that God ask us to. Without a question, some of the biggest mistakes I have made in my life have been because I was impatient, I didn't prayer about them, I didn't give myself or others enough time to see another solution, I just acted.

I cannot count how many times I have faced situations in my life and in the lives of others where I literally had no idea how I would get through it, in fact I have had people say to me, "I don't know how you were able to be present in that?" and my answer is always the same, because I prayed and in my prayers, in my relationships with God, in my communicating my deepest fears, worries, joys and concerns, I felt God's presence and knew that I was never alone in it. And that gave me the power I needed to move forward. And I use that word power intentionally, because the biblical understanding of power is not might, or control, or authority, but instead is the foresight to act. When one cultivates a practise of prayer its means we have enough patience, first of all to take the time to pray, but we gain patience by taking the time to listen for God's word in our lives, and from that we generate the gentle strength to act; not muscle to help us lift, or the strength tot break down the door, but the inner strength a gentle strength to face the hardship before us looking for God's grace within it. Having enough patience to pray and to listen for how we can be changed by God, gives us

the foresight to act in Godly ways and isn't that what faith is all about. May it be so with all of us. Amen.