

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost; July 18, 2010
Grace and Glory Lutheran Church; Ken Albright, pastor
Text: Luke 10: 38-42
Theme: The Fruit of Patience

College professor, Joan Walden shared that:

***During speech course she taught,
she spoke about a Chinese student who, after moving to the United States,
decided she wanted an English name to honor her new home.
"She chose the name Patience," Joan told the class,
"because she wanted to be reminded to be patient.
Every time someone called her name, the message was reinforced."***

***Then she asked the students what names they would select for themselves.
After considering the question, one young man raised his hand
and said, "Rich."***

Well, the message I want to reinforce today is Patience.
Patience is one of the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5. It is part of the picture of a life lived in pursuit of Jesus' teachings. Patience.

In Today's Gospel story, Mary and Martha don't look like the sibling poster children for patience.

In fact, Martha is quite fed up with Mary.

She has seemingly lost all patience with her sister's behavior.

As important as hospitality is in the Jewish culture, here is Martha, struggling to take care of all of the hosting tasks while her sister sits at the feet of Jesus.

Martha has grown quite impatient with Mary. And she tries to triangle Jesus into siding with her—to get Mary off the couch and into the kitchen.

So, there is some impatience in this story.

And isn't it true, that the people we often have the most trouble being patient with are our family members?

There is a spiritual tug-of-war that goes on inside of us.

A battle that just seems to drag on. A war that just won't end.

You can see it in this story.

What are the forces at work here? What are the oppositional forces?

If there is a tug-of-war here, what are the two sides?

Is it doing verses being?

Martha is doing the things that have to be done to host properly.

Yet Mary is simply sitting at Jesus' feet, listening.

Does that tension exist in you? When have you done enough? When is it time to just sit for a spell and soak in the sights and sounds and be renewed?

Is the tension distraction verses attraction?

Martha's attention is divided. There is fraction between the many little things that need doing—and the sister who won't do a darn thing to help.

Meanwhile Mary is attracted to Jesus. She is pulled into the conversation. She is drawn by his wise words and charisma.

What about you? What are the distractions that pull you away from being in the Lord's house? What are the distractions that you entertain even when you are in the Lord's house? What things, what attitude, what devices, what mentality are you finding you need to leave behind when you come into the Lord's house? When you come to the awareness that the Lord is in your house?

Perhaps another aspect of the tug-of-war is the tension between what makes a person experience being welcomed.

Is it the crisp sheets and turned comforter and the washed baseboards and the waxed floors and the freshly squeezed juice and a newspaper at breakfast?

Is that where the welcome focus is found?

Or is it in the attentive ear that listens to the guest and is intrigued by their stories, and swaps stories until it is way past "pumpkin time."

Perhaps patience is something we grow toward as we live in the tension.

As we find that sometimes the Lord may lean this way, and sometimes that way.

One day he may say Mary's right. And the next day, Martha's right.

We become more patient with others, as we begin to see that as right as I think I am, they may very well be the one who is right.

And more importantly—that it is not so much about being right at all. About getting our way. About getting our needs met--

But about being in tune with what Jesus is doing.

What he is determining is needful for me to focus on.

What he is suggesting is the better part for me to pursue today.

What task he is trying to center my attraction upon.

Jesus tells Martha she is "distracted by many things."

What, I wonder, is the **relationship between distractions and patience?**

Distractions are those things that pull our attention away from what is important.

Patience, on the other hand, keeps us focused on what is important.

When we are distracted, we begin to focus on the flaws. We begin to pull at the loose threads. We begin to notice the negative in others, and perhaps ourselves too.

But the fruit of patience is where we sense God's spirit at work in us—helping us to stay focused on what is going to bring life in the long run.
What is ultimately going to help peace to prevail.

Another word for patience is “long suffering.”
We are willing to suffer through things if we know in our hearts that the suffering is going to ultimately produce something beneficial.

Some dictionaries define patience as: Endurance under injuries inflicted by others.
God's good work in us is to produce people who live in such a way, that the inflictions others produce in their lives don't result in retaliation
But in forgiveness.
When others fail us, we are called to be patient—to bear with their flaws.
When others don't fulfill our expectations—we are called to become clearer together in those expectations.

I think back to that Chinese student who gave herself the name, Patience
So that she might be reminded—each time her name was called—to live up to her namesake.
In baptism, each of us is named “Christian.”
Perhaps we need patience to see ourselves becoming, day by day, more like our namesake. Perhaps we might remind each other, call each other “Christian” that it might be re-inforced that indeed we bear with one another—are patient with each other, because Christ himself is being born anew in ourselves, and in the others around us, every day.

**Certainly in the Scriptures we call our own as Christians,
We encounter a God who not only desires patience from us,
But who has patience with God's people.**

One of my favorite passages in Scripture that is a part of our worship is the word that is on Jonah's lips, when he is taken aback at how patient God is with the people of Ninevah. He says: For I knew that you were a gracious God, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

The patience, the long suffering character we are building is patterned in the very image of our God, who displays the ultimate patience in dealing with each one of us, individually, and collectively.

Even as creation groans the impact of our greed and short-sightedness, God is patient, renewing our botching of creation with the perseverance of a wildlife biologist scrubbing oil-laden sea turtles with a toothbrush, one at a time.

God is patient—with us. God is long-suffering through our selfish ways.
Continuing to point us to resources for healing and hope—to the bread and wine—the
food of his presence that we need.

And the Lord is not only at His table. The Lord is at ours. The Lord is in our
relationships, our rivalries, at our dinner tables—patiently re-directing us—helping us
see the error in our judgments—challenging us to do the one thing needed—to find the
golden thread of his teaching.

Patience. The Lord is with us, beside us, he's there.
Gathered in the places we inhabit. And he's patient.
And when the right moment comes—as it did at Martha's home,
Jesus' word cuts to the quick—
and evokes opportunity for healing, for change, for fresh starts and fine tuning.

In Jesus' name.
Amen.