

## Reflective Worship 5<sup>th</sup> May 2024

### The fruit of the Spirit is.... Patience

*All the readings can be found on pp5&6*

“Are we nearly there yet?”

The sound every adult travelling with a child dreads..

Especially when heard 15 minutes into a three hour journey...

And – when we’ve finished screaming - it’s easy to smile indulgently at “the kids”, with no real concept of time - or distance – but aren’t we all the same?

“Can’t wait til we go on holiday...”

“Will this bus ever turn up?”

Patience.

Is there – has there ever been – enough patience to go round?

I’d like to suggest that a lack of patience is so prevalent that most of us have no qualms about admitting it. And that it’s probably one of the failures that we bring to confession week by week.

I wonder why?

Maybe there’s more to patience than we realise?

Maybe patience encompasses more than just being a bit snippy with someone when they interrupt us – or keep us waiting?

Maybe those things are a bit like the part of the iceberg you can see above the water – 10%. A kind of warning of the 90% of the hazard that we don’t see – where the damage can be done.

Perhaps three examples from Scripture can help us to get a bit of a handle on patience, and so help us to work with the Spirit in growing this lovely fruit.

Patience in waiting...

Readings from

Isaiah 40

Malachi 4

Luke 1

Like the child on the journey, we find it so hard to wait. We, too, get impatient.

Between the passage from Malachi – the final words of the OT – and the promise to Zechariah and Elizabeth there was silence for 400 years. Something like five and a half centuries passed between the promise in Isaiah 40 and the beginning of the ministry of their son, John the Baptist. And during those long years, the people of Israel waited for God's promises to be fulfilled. Twenty or thirty generations lived and died without seeing them come to fruition. But they waited loyally and patiently – never giving up hope.

Sometimes we have to wait until the time is right. The Bible even has a separate word for this meaning of time – *Kairos*.

When the farmer plants, they have to wait for the harvest. Even I know that you don't dig up a seed to see if it's sprouting yet!

We've just heard about Elizabeth and Zechariah – they have waited so long for this child – and yet now they have to wait for another 9 months before they can finally hold their baby. Yet who wants the baby to come before its time? Before the time is right for it to be born? Sometimes we have to wait – for the better weather. For the medical test to run and the results to become available.

Waiting – being patient – in these circumstances is so hard. The timing is out of our control. Maybe that is what we find so hard about it - there is nothing we can do about it.

And yet maybe there is something we can do, with the help of the Spirit. Maybe we can learn to consciously place it back into God's hands.

Neither to resent it, nor to try to ignore it, but to acknowledge it, and to hand it back to God – for God's timing. Which will be the right time.

But there's another aspect of waiting where we need to exercise patience – and that's where we need to be patient with someone else. To wait for them to catch on, to catch up, maybe even to heal, before something else can happen. Maybe until something new can begin, or a friendship be restored.

*A brief summary of the story of Jonah*

Jonah has his strop and God waits – until he has reached the point where he is ready to move forward.

Maybe sometimes we need to seek the wisdom of the Spirit to know when to speak – and also when to be silent.

To allow someone the time and space they need to be able to move on.

And also the wisdom of the Spirit to know when that time has come.

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So, if the first place where we need patience is in waiting for the right time, maybe the next thing to consider is the **patience we need when we just need to endure.**

The Message version of the passage describing the fruit of the Spirit translates patience as “the willingness to stick with things”

The patience to carry on day after day, living as God wants us to, doing what we have been called to do – in the face of opposition and maybe ridicule. Even danger. This was the fate of many of the OT prophets, of St Paul, of Jesus himself.

Reading from Hebrews 12:1-3

At times like these the Spirit assures us of our faith and strengthens our Christian hope – not hope like “I hope it’s sunny tomorrow”, but hope as in “something that is sure to happen”.

At a particularly difficult time in my life I came across a really helpful article in a Christian magazine. One thing in particular stood out for me – a saying which helped to keep me going when things seemed very grim - “The only way out of the desert is through it.”

Faith kept me moving onwards with God - towards the hope of emerging into a new life beyond the desert.

Stick with it. Be patient.

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If we had used the NIV instead of the NRSV for our opening reading this evening, we probably wouldn’t be speaking about patience at all, but about **‘forbearance’**, which is how the word is translated in that version.

“Forbearance – a refraining from the enforcement of something due eg a debt, right, or obligation”

So, patience with others, “cutting them some slack”

I guess an alternative word would be mercy

If we thought the other ways of thinking about patience were tough – how about this one?

*Recap Matthew 26:36-45*

Jesus knew better than any of us just how frail human beings are. We make mistakes. Get it wrong. All the time. He’s just spent his last evening trying one last time to help his friends understand who he is and what he is about. His betrayer is already on the way. By this time tomorrow he will have been tortured to death.

And yet, Jesus shows infinite patience and love to Peter James and John in their human sleepiness and failing.

I wonder how different our lives – the world – might be, if we could more clearly hear the promptings of the Spirit of Jesus when others let us down? If we could begin to be more forbearing, more patient with our imperfect fellow-humans.

And I wonder how different our lives might be if we could have that same patience with ourselves. For what is true for Jesus and Peter, James and John is equally true of Jesus, his Father, the Spirit and us. The Bible is full of references to God's forbearance, his patience, with his people.

St Paul takes it one step further. Rather than despairing of his habitual failing, he says that actually this very weakness keeps him strong<sup>1</sup>, because it keeps him relying on God.

Maybe we could do less beating up of ourselves, if we allow the Spirit to remind us that we're not in this on our own.

If we remember that we are God's beloved children. And that living the way he wants us to live is not so much about passing some sort of divine GCSEs or SATS, but about helping us to have flourishing relationships and joyful, abundant life.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience...

And patience has lots of facets, not least

Waiting for the right time

For God's time

For other people to be ready

Enduring

A willingness to stick with things in faith and hope

Forbearance

Showing mercy to others in their failings

And to ourselves in our own short-comings

Mirroring and modelling God's own patience with us

The fruit of the Spirit grows in us when we allow ourselves to be open to the promptings and guidance of the Spirit. It's not about trying harder, being more self-disciplined, making ourselves be anything. These fruits grow as we listen to the Spirit, follow Jesus' example, allow ourselves to receive God's love and allow it to flow through us and out into the world.

Come, Holy Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor 12: 7

## Readings

Isaiah 40: 1-5

Comfort, O comfort my people,  
says your God.

<sup>2</sup>Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that she has served her term,  
that her penalty is paid,  
that she has received from the Lord's hand  
double for all her sins.

<sup>3</sup>A voice cries out:  
'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

<sup>4</sup>Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.

<sup>5</sup>Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,  
and all people shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'

From Malachi Chapter 4

See, the day is coming....

for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings.  
You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.

Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of  
the Lord comes. <sup>6</sup>He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of  
children to their parents..

From Luke 1

*Zechariah the priest and Elizabeth, his wife, are godly people – but are getting on in years  
and have no children.*

*One day, Zechariah is on duty in the holiest place of the temple...*

"Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of  
incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. But the  
angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife  
Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John...

He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of  
Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the  
disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.'

A brief version of the story of Jonah...

God sends the prophet Jonah to preach to the people of Nineveh, telling them to turn away from their evil ways and worship God, or dreadful things will happen.

Jonah doesn't want to – he runs in the opposite direction. But after an encounter with a very big fish, he finally does as he's been told. He goes to Nineveh and preaches. The people all repent, and disaster is averted.

But Jonah is furious. How dare God warn the people and give them chance to escape their just desserts? He goes off in a sulk, and sits in the desert outside the city to see what will happen.

And God lets him sit and think. God even provides a plant to give Jonah some shade from the fierce desert sun – and then, when the time is right, God speaks again....

From Hebrews 12: 1-3

"...let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

From Matthew 26:36 – 46

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane....

He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, 'I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.' And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed...

'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.'

Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, 'So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.'

Again he went away for the second time and prayed...

Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.

So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words.

Then he came to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand.....