

**Sermon for Zion Presbyterian Church – February 17, 2019**

**Hymns:** 482 - Christ is made the sure foundation; 553 – May the Lord bless you;  
64 – Be still and know; 489 – Help us to help each other, Lord

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:21-24; Ephesians 4:1-6; Galatians 5:22-23

**Sermon Title:** Fruit of the Spirit – Patience (*Rev. Douglas Rollwage*)

***Matthew 5:21-24 NRSV***

*“You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.*

***Ephesians 4:1-6 NLT***

*Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all.*

***Galatians 5:22-23 NLT***

*The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!*

You pay me to study, teach and preach the Bible, and I’m deeply grateful to you. The Bible is an unending source of amazement and inspiration to me, and conveying that to you through Bible Study, Sermon and Sacrament is a privilege and a joy. Whether looking at the Big Picture of the Bible beginning to end, studying a Biblical book, or focussing attention on a single word, there is a richness and sense of discovery every time.

Like this morning's passage. We're continuing our series on the Fruit of the Spirit, and the fourth attribute outlined in Paul's list is "patience." But it isn't translated as "patience" in all versions of the Bible; some use "long-suffering," some use "forbearance," whatever "forbearance" means. Which is it?

In the ancient Greek which St. Paul used, the word is "makrothymia," which is a compound word: "makros," meaning "long;" and "thymos," meaning "anger" or "passion" (not in the sense of romantic-love-type-passion, but in the sense of getting all riled up). "Temper" would be another good translation of "thymos." Putting all this together, "long-tempered" gets the meaning across nicely, if we understand it to be the opposite of "short-tempered." We all know what "short-tempered" means, so think of "makrothymia" as the opposite. "Not short-tempered" is the best translation.

For Paul, being "not-short-tempered" - let's just use "patient" from now on - for Paul, being patient is key to being a strong church. It is a sign to believers and unbelievers alike that our faith is real, and that the Spirit of God is active among us. *"We prove ourselves by our purity, our understanding, our patience, our kindness, by the Holy Spirit within us, and by our sincere love,"* he writes (2 Corinthians 6:6). *"Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience,"* he adds (Colossians 3:12). But Paul really ramps it up in his letter to the Ephesians (4:1-4):

*I beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.*

*"Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love."* In other words, when people are making you angry, remember that you're not perfect either - remember how other people, in love, have been patient with you. *"Making allowances for each other because you love each other,"* is how JB Philips put it. *"Putting up with each other in love,"* is another great translation, and a key to how Dana puts up with me.

But more than being patient because others are patient with us, Paul reminds us that we should be patient with one another **because God is patient with us**. In a moment of rare humility, Paul writes (1 Timothy 1:16 NLT), *"God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and*

*receive eternal life.*” To the Christians in Rome, he adds, with more typical directness (Romans 9:22): *“In the same way, even though God has the right to show his anger and his power, he is very patient with those on whom his anger falls, who are destined for destruction... Don’t you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? (2:4)”*

The patience of God in dealing with the likes of you and me goes back many years before Paul realised how patient God was being with him. It is, in fact, a central component of God’s very character. In an astonishing moment of self-revelation, way back in the book of Exodus, God appeared to Moses, and revealed to Moses the very core of “Who God Is” (Exodus 34:6): *And the Lord passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness...”* There’s our word again, but in the Hebrew form – “erek appayim,” “*slow to anger.*” Our responsive Psalm reflects this very language:

*The Lord is compassionate and merciful,  
slow to anger and filled with unfailing love.  
He does not punish us for all our sins;  
he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve.*

*“Compassionate and merciful, slow to anger and filled with unfailing love.”* That’s who God revealed himself to be, and in Jesus, that revelation was made flesh. Can you think of a better description of Jesus than, *“Compassionate and merciful, slow to anger and filled with unfailing love?”* And that’s supposed to describe us, too; we who are called Christian: *“Compassionate and merciful, slow to anger and filled with unfailing love.”*

The Gospels don’t record Jesus ever using our word “makrothymia,” but he did talk about anger, in the Sermon on the Mount. Listen: (Matthew 5:21-22):

*“You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you yourself are heading to the fire of destruction.”*

Jesus describes the way anger ramps up: first comes Anger, then come harsh words and division, and then comes contempt – regarding another person as worthless. Writing them off. You’ve seen it happen: “I’m so angry with you. You’re

such an idiot! I don't want to see you again. I wish you were dead!" God forbid you or I have ever said, or even thought such things. But chances are, we have. Maybe not all three stages; maybe, if we are a particularly long-tempered person, we're never progressed past Stage One. But that's where anger leads. And it has no place in the community of faith we call The Church. Anger is the opposite of, and deadly to, the unity we are to have as the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. So much so, Jesus says that before we approach God in worship, we must fix things up between ourselves and those with whom we share a disagreement:

*So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:22-24)*

Notice that Jesus says, "*if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you.*" If you have done something to cause another person to be angry with you, Jesus calls you to take the initiative, and begin the process of reconciliation, whether you were in the right or the wrong. And if another person has done something to anger you, again, it is up to you to initiate reconciliation. That's what it means when we pray, "*Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who have sinned against us.*" And that's hard to do, without a pretty good helping of patience, of long-suffering, of forbearance. Of being long-tempered. Of makrothymia.

We'll gather shortly for our Annual Meeting. There's so much for which we will be thanking God, rejoicing together as a congregation blessed in countless ways. Among the greatest of blessings is the spirit of camaraderie, of fellowship, of joy, which is so much a part of who we are. I am thankful for your patience with me. I am thankful for the spirit of unity and friendship we as a congregation share. It is a sign, together with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, of the Spirit of God at work within us and among us.

We'll give Paul (for whom patience must have been a daily struggle) the final word: "*I beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all.*" Thanks be to God! Amen.