

## **Sermon Series on the Fruit of the Spirit**

### **Week #2: Patience & Faithfulness**

I speak to you in the name of God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Please be seated.

Last week in our sermon series, we talked about kindness and generosity as elements of the fruit of the Spirit. This week we turn our focus to patience and faithfulness. These two aspects of the fruit of the Spirit seem a little more challenging because it is not necessarily in our human nature to want to wait, to want to hang in there when we don't see results for our efforts coming quickly. You will remember that in July I shared a timeline that was created by theologian Sylvia Keesmaat. In that diagram, Keesmaat identified a series of key events that marked the Biblical history of Christianity; from Creation in Genesis 1 & 2 to the end of time in Revelation 21-22. You may also recall that we fit somewhere along the continuum between the founding of the Early Church and the words of Revelation 21: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.'" We do not know when the ending time will come because this will happen at a time of God's own choosing. Our role at our point in the history of the Church is to continue to build up the body of Christ during our own lifetimes, to model Christian values to the world through acts of faith and service. And we are called to do this in a way that honours who we are as ACPC and who we are as members of this community. While we have not travelled this path before in our own history as ACPC, we can trust that God knows the outcome and we have His promise that He will walk with us.

But this is sometimes very hard. It is hard to be in the middle of the plotline when we don't know what all of the twists and turns will be between today and the end of time. Earlier this summer we heard the story of David, which read something like a soap opera at times. In that story, we gained a lot of insight into David's character, and we saw that he really excelled at times in so many of the areas that Paul is warning the Galatians about: self-indulgence, drunkenness, envy, jealousy, quarreling, anger, divisiveness, lust, and impurity. But we had the advantage in reading or hearing David's story because we could

skip ahead to the end. The challenge for the Church and for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that God's plotline between now and the end of time remains a mystery to us. And it is doubly challenging at times because our human inclination is towards measuring time in relation to our lifetimes. But sometimes God's purposes and God's story needs many generations to fully unfold. And this is where patience and faithfulness are really needed.

In our Old Testament reading from the book of Joshua, we know, at this point in the story of the Hebrews who escaped slavery in Egypt and spent many years trekking the desert to cross the Jordan River, that Joshua is now the leader. Moses died before the people could enter into the Promised Land, and God appointed Joshua as Moses' successor. We know that Moses made many mistakes over the course of that journey, but he did exhibit much patience and faithfulness over those many years. It must have been very challenging for Moses to accept that God would not allow him to see the final destination after such a long and difficult journey. But Moses made peace with God, and the mantle of leadership then fell to Joshua. At this point in the story, we find Joshua exhibiting a deep faithfulness to God by taking a very firm line with the Hebrew community about where their loyalties will lie; either they will choose to follow God OR they will choose to follow a way of life that is contrary to the 10 Commandments. Joshua makes his own position very clear when he states, "...as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." He challenges the Hebrew community to choose between the polytheistic religious beliefs and practices of the Egyptians and the Amorites and serving one God, the true God. He is effectively demanding an unwavering faithfulness from the people. In that moment, a new covenant between the people of Israel and God is then forged and cemented; that covenant is to be a sign of Israel's faithfulness to God.

In a similar vein, the author of our Psalm chosen for this morning is encouraging us to turn away from the activities and ideas of those who live in ways that are contrary to what God asks of us. We are reminded that, although people who live for themselves and for their own pleasures seem to be rewarded for living selfish lives, this is ultimately not true. Lying, cheating, stealing, using other people – these are not the hallmarks of the good life for Christians. Again, it is our tendency to measure time in relation to our own

lifespans. But we are advised here to think about eternity rather than to think just about this temporal life. We are spiritual beings who inhabit mortal bodies. While the body will perish after so many years, the soul goes on to live in eternity. The Psalmist encourages us to be patient, to be faithful throughout our human lifespans so that our lives are marked by the fruit of the Spirit. In doing so, we will be able to relate to God on a different level, a deeper and more spiritual level once we enter into heaven.

In our Gospel reading from Mark, the theme of patience and faithfulness is illustrated for us through the image of the mustard tree. The mustard tree grows naturally in several areas around Israel. It is an impressive plant, growing to about 10 feet in height despite the fact that the seed that is the source of that growth is very tiny. At the time that this Gospel was written, the mustard seed was the smallest of all seeds in that part of the world. And yet, within a single growing season, it can produce an amazing plant. Over several seasons of growth, it becomes a tree with branches that spread out over several meters, providing not only more mustard seed, but also providing a resting place for birds and much needed shade for those living in that desert climate. We are reminded that life itself and how life is perpetuated are still mysteries to us, as is the kingdom of God. Like the mustard seeds that are sown in the parable, we will grow. But whether or not we grow to be healthy and tall and sturdy and able to withstand storms depends entirely on our choices during this lifetime. There is not shortcut, and this is where patience and faithfulness become tools for good growth in our lives. Using this same image of plant life and growth, Paul reminds us in our passage about fruit of the Spirit that the fruit that our lives produce can be amazing. When we and others see that fruit of the Spirit being cultivated and coming to maturity in our lives, then we know that God is at work in us, doing more than we can ask or imagine.

When we think of ACPC, we know that we are in a time that requires our patience and our faithfulness. We are still figuring out where God is calling us next, and we need to stay attuned to those signs that we are on the right path. Throughout the month of September, we will continue to discuss how the fruit of the Spirit can also be a sign that God is at work in the life of ACPC. We need to continue to move forward in ways that help

us to cultivate and nurture that fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, humility, and self-control. It is my goal and the goal of ACPC Council that we will be in a position to advertise for a priest-in-charge or equivalent by June of 2026 when my term as your Pastoral Administrator will come to a close. But we need to take some time to first figure out what kinds of skills and talents we need from a priest-in-charge or equivalent, and what we, as a faith community, can offer that person. Last week you received a newsletter along with an invitation to participate in our stewardship campaign, and a form to fill out. This stewardship campaign is NOT about asking you to empty your wallets. Rather, it is an important opportunity for us to take an inventory of all of the ministries that we have at work across ACPC and to take stock of the interests, time, and talents that our people are willing to share as we move forward. When we go grocery shopping, we check the fridge and the cupboards to find out what we have and what we need. In this same way, we need to know what ministries we are prepared to nurture over the next two years so that, when we advertise for a priest-in-charge, we know both what we need and what we have to offer. And so the pledge form focuses first on the areas of time and talent which are critical to our success going forward. The portion that asks about treasure, or money, is to help ACPC Council get some idea of how we might finance ministry over the next two years and beyond. The big goal is for ACPC to be a stable and sustainable faith community that exhibits the fruit of the Spirit now and into the future. And so I would ask you to prayerfully consider filling out that form and placing it on the collection plate in the envelope that was provided. You may wish to mark the word, “stewardship” on the envelope so that our counters will know to put those envelopes to one side. These forms are confidential and will be seen only by me and by the treasurers. Our goal is to have 100% participation, and even if you fill out the form by indicating that you are unable to do or to give anything at this time, that will really help us to plan where best to put our energies over the next two years. Amen.