

## **Patience**

Mark 13:1-8

November 11, 2012

I am waiting ...

I am waiting for summer to come, for the opportunity to be out hiking the trails and kayaking the bays in Maine once again.

Be patient. Be patient.

I am waiting for our children, for all our children and grandchildren, to make good decisions, to make the one good decision which is most important of all, to put the Lord our God at the center of their lives.

Be patient. Be patient.

I am waiting my mother's hip to heal, for Greg Hoekstra's knee to heal, for Teri's stomach to heal.

Be patient. Be patient.

I am waiting for the people of our nation and its leaders to get beyond the bitterness of this last election, to rise above the animosity and mistrust and indignation, to affirm common values and to work together to achieve common goals.

Be patient. Be patient.

I am waiting for Sandy's victims to get their power back and get their lives back, to be able to get back to the business of making some kind of decent life for themselves and their families and their communities.

Be patient. Be patient.

I am waiting for Haiti's suffering to be noticed, too, for the victimization of its people by Sandy to be publicized, and for the rest of the world to declare that such hunger and disease and endemic poverty is unacceptable and must be changed, whatever it takes, whatever it costs.

Be patient. Be patient.

I am waiting for the cycle of poverty in this nation to be broken, for rich and poor to speak with a common voice out of common concern, for the social and political will, not to just make token handouts, but to address the root causes that keep the dream of equal opportunity nothing more than a dream.

Be patient. Be patient.

I am waiting for the people of our nation to repent of our original sin, to root out racism from our workplaces and from our churches, from our justice system and from our hearts.

Be patient. Be patient.

No! I won't! I won't be patient! Not if it means sitting on my hands and going on my way and doing whatever I usually do while the world goes to hell! Not if it means keeping quiet in the face of injustice. Not if it means standing by while people I know and love are suffering. Not if it means looking away while people I don't know but love too are suffering.

Be patient.

It's so easy for the rich to say to the poor, for the privileged to say to the underprivileged, for the well to say to the sick, for the powerful to say to the powerless, for those who are comfortable to say to those who are hurting. It's a delaying tactic, a way to change the subject, a means of pacifying and mollifying and disempowering people who are suffering. Be patient.

I won't be patient, if that's what patience means. But it doesn't.

The patience I want to talk about is not weak, but strong, not passive, but active, not a prelude to giving up, but a prompt to work harder. The patience I want to talk about is one of the fruits of the work of God's Spirit among us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control.

Are self-control and humility weak? Are love and peace and faithfulness and goodness passive? Patience is part of this list, another of the distinctive virtues that mark the people of God, the people in whom God is seen, the people through whom God is working.

Elsa Tamez, in her commentary on the New Testament letter of James, calls it "militant patience," not resigned or submissive, but active and heroic. "To be patient," she says, "means to persevere, to resist, to be constant, unbreakable, immovable."

Being patient is not about “settling,” not about being content with things however they are, even if things are not as they should be. Being patient is about doing all that is in your power to make things be as they should be, as long as it takes, whatever the pace, until it happens.

Every week, we pray: “Thy kingdom come.” We are waiting for God’s kingdom to come. But that’s not all we pray. We pray: “Thy kingdom come; thy will be done.” The two go together. God’s kingdom comes, as God’s will is done. We don’t pray for God’s kingdom to come, and bide our time in the meanwhile. We do God’s will, we do what God calls us to do, so that God’s kingdom will come!

But it is a prayer. We know we can’t do it, by our own power. We ask God to do it. We ask God to do it, in us and through us, by bringing to life in us all the fruits of God’s Spirit, including patience.

This is patience: doing all we can to make it happen, but trusting God to make it happen, trusting that God will make it happen.

But when? That’s what Peter and Andrew and James and John wanted to know. When?

And Jesus’ answer? Look around. What do you see? What do you see? Earthquakes and hunger, wars and religious charlatans, people suffering, people being oppressed, good people -- God’s people -- being oppressed. This is what we see.

Yes, Jesus, this is what we see, but when? When will God’s kingdom come?

*These things are like the first pains of childbirth.*

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Be patient! This is but the beginning ...

Be patient! This is but the beginning of much more pain, much more labor and suffering and struggle, to come ...

Be patient! Because you know what is coming at the end of the labor, at the end of the pain, at the end of the struggle!

When a woman is giving birth, is she patient? Yes! She has to be! She must patiently wait for the new life to be born from her. She waits, but she doesn't just wait! She is working hard! She is laboring, struggling, keeping on, enduring the pain, putting all she has on the line -- physically and emotionally -- for the sake of the life to be.

My dear friends, we are pregnant! We are pregnant, the church is pregnant, the world is pregnant ... with the kingdom of God! So be patient! God's kingdom is being born!

It is being born by God, in us and from us. It's not going to be easy. Birthing this child will be long and hard and painful. But it will be worth it! It will all be worth it!