

Pastor Jennifer prepared to preach about peace last Sunday. But Hurricane Helene and the flood water came, the trees and the power went, and we couldn't have the Sunday worship service at Triune. "Are you going to preach your sermon about peace next Sunday?" asked one of Pastor Jennifer's friends. "No," answered Pastor Jennifer, "We have to hurry up and get to patience!"

"Dear God, please give me patience," goes the old prayer, "and give it to me now!"

I walked around the dining hall on Monday morning at the Mercy Center. "Would you like to help me with Sunday's sermon." I asked my friends. "When I say the word 'patience,' what's the first story that comes to your mind."

"It's a story about how I do not have patience!" answered each and every person I asked.

Maybe you would answer my question that way, too.

Yet you all have been role models of patience to me this week. You have preached patience with your actions much better than I can preach about patience with words. "We got our power back," you said, "So come to my house if you need a hot shower, a hot meal, or a place to charge your phone."

"I don't like Vienna Sausages," you said. "So you can take them out of my bag and give them to someone else who might need them."

You slowed down your lives for the sake of others.

That is a beautiful image of patience.

When Paul uses the word 'patience' in his writing about the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, he uses the Greek word 'maklothymia.'

According to Eugenia Anne Gamble in her book *Tending the Wild Garden*, this word for 'patience' means "that quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation or wrong that does not hastily retaliate or promptly punish, even when one could or it would seem justified to do so. It refers to a quiet, waiting wisdom and compassion that does not surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial. It is not passive. It is concentrated and controlled strength that is at the same time mild, compassionate, and constant in all circumstances."

Wow.

Let me read that definition one more time, slowly, so we can take in each word.

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Wow.

The opposite of 'makrothymia' is found in a story Pastor Amanda, our beloved former Associate Pastor here at Triune, told me on Tuesday.

"After Hurricane Helene hit our area," she said, "there was only one gas station that had gas in Honea Path. But the police department had to shut it down because there were too many fights between the people who were trying to get gas!"

Yep, that's the opposite of 'makrothymia.'

Today we will look closely at and listen carefully to the 'makrothymia' meaning of 'patience.'

We will ask three questions:

1. How can we have patience with others?
2. How can we have patience with ourselves?
3. How can we have patience with God?

Then we will go out into the world around us and try to live out the answers to these questions so we can help build a world that is more human, more patient and kind, for everyone.

When I walked around the dining room and asked my friends for help with this sermon, most of them told me stories like this one.

“One of our social workers helped me apply for food stamps three weeks ago. The food stamps were first sent to Columbia, where I used to live. Then, they got lost. They haven’t made it to Greenville yet. But I’m trying to be nice instead of doing what I’d like to do and shake the food stamp people by the shoulders and shout, ‘I’m hungry! I need to eat!’”

How can we have patience with others?

Or stories like this one.

“Since I’ve been sick, I’ve had less patience with myself. I’m always getting on to myself and thinking, ‘Why did you say that?’ or ‘Why did you do that?’ or ‘Why didn’t you say that?’ or ‘Why didn’t you do that?’ I’m tough on myself. I don’t have any patience with myself.”

How can we be patient with ourselves?

I’d like to teach you something I’ve learned to do when I need to be patient with others or with myself.

It’s called Franciscan lectio divina. It’s a way to ‘divinely read’ the world in a way that St. Francis and St. Clare modeled for us.

Here is a painting in front of us.

Take a moment and:

1. GAZE at the painting. Rest your eyes on it. Let it still you. If your eyes or thoughts start to wander, bring them back to the painting.
2. CONSIDER the painting. Do you see or hear God? What of God do you see or hear?
3. CONTEMPLATE the painting. Be with God in the present moment. Pour out yourself and be filled with the Spirit of Christ.
4. IMITATE what you've seen and heard from God. Become who God wants you to be, do what God wants you to do.

Do this kind of lectio divina with anyone who or anything that means a lot to you.

I think this exercise will help you become patient with others and with yourself.

How can we be patient with God?

What is your image of God?

The way you see God with the eyes of your heart and hear God with the ears of your heart will affect the way you walk with God.

On Wednesday morning, I was talking with one of our kind Mercy Center volunteers.

“I heard someone say, ‘The reason God struck Asheville with such a catastrophic flood is because there are so many wicked, sinful people there,’” he lamented.

The person who said that has an image of God that Job's friends had.

People like that think if you are good then God will reward you, if you are bad then God will punish you.

If you're Job or the people of Asheville, it's hard to be patient with a God like that.

Thankfully, God is not like that.

On Tuesday, Pastor Beth, a friend in a group of pastors I meet with each week, taught me something that I didn't know.

In the Old Testament book of Exodus, we find the only moment in the whole of Scripture where God describes Godself.

God says:

I, the Lord, am a God who is full of compassion and pity, who is not easily angered and who shows great love and faithfulness. I keep my promise for thousands of generations and forgive evil and sin...(34)

The prophet Hosea had and proclaimed this image of God.

I draw (my people) to me with affection and love. I picked them up and held them to my cheek; I bent down to them and fed them...I am God and not a human being. I, the Holy One, am with you. I will not come to you in anger. (11)

It's possible to be patient with a God like that, don't you think?

Thankfully, God is 'makrothymia' and when we follow in Jesus' footsteps, we become 'makrothymia' too.

When we follow in Jesus' footsteps, God forms the fruit of patience inside of us.

Let me tell you a story about a small moment from my life when I was a missionary and lived in Mali, West Africa.

It was early morning.

The African sun had yet to rise above the mountains, and the sky was the soft yellow of newly shucked corn.

“Beep, beep,” sounded the horn on the old truck as it rumbled to a stop in front of my house.

My old friends – Momadu, Madu, and Balamusa – greeted me with smiles, waves, and morning blessings.

We were on our way from Kenieba, a small town in western Mali, to Sitaxoto, a large village about two hours away over a broken dirt road.

A church was there, a little group of people who met each week outside under a big baobab tree to pray, study the Bible, share their stories and ask, “How do we follow Jesus?”

On that day, we were going to share communion with them.

Before we left town, we stopped at the home of a baker with a stone oven to buy the bread that would become a symbol of Jesus’ body.

We bought dried leaves to make the red tea that would become a symbol of Jesus’ blood.

“Beep, beep!”

With waves and departing blessings, we were off.



We arrived at Sitaxoto and found the believers sitting in a circle in the shade of the great tree.

We spoke to each other and blessed each other in the customary and humanizing way of the Malinke people.

“How are you ... How is your family ... How are your children ... May God send rain to your field ... May God give you enough food to eat ... May God give you healthy children.”

Their arms hugged me and their words encouraged me.

As we began the communion liturgy, Momadu whispered to me, “Will you say the words? It would be meaningful to our friends.”

“Yes,” I answered in broken Malinke. “I would like that very much.”

I held the bread tenderly in my hands, gave thanks, broke it apart and gave it away saying: “This is Jesus’ body, which is given for you. Take it and eat it in remembrance of him.”

Everyone ate the bread except a woman across from me in the circle.

“Why didn’t she eat the bread?” I whispered to Momadu. “Do you think she understood my Malinke?”

“It’s OK,” he answered. “I’ll tell you later.”

After the service, Momadu placed his arm around my shoulder and said, “Look very closely at our friend.”

I looked at her and saw what I had not seen during communion.

There was a child in her lap laying against her body, a child as thin and frail as one of the furthest limbs on the tree.

“Her daughter has been sick for some time,” said Momadu.

“Bread is expensive for her to buy. She was saving the bread for her daughter.”

I was speechless.

Here, I had come to bring God to my African friends.

Instead, God came to me in this African woman and her child.

God is like that.

How can we be patient with others?

How can we be patient with ourselves?

How can we be patient with God?

We can sow the seeds of patience by reading the world around us as St. Francis and St. Clare read the world around them, by Gazing, Considering, Contemplating and Imitating all that is good and meaningful to us.

And we can hold an image of God in our hearts that Moses, Hosea, Jesus, Francis and Clare held in their hearts, an image of a loving God who forms all of the fruit of the Spirit inside of us, even the fruit of patience.

As we move now to our celebration of the Lord's Supper, a celebration we are sharing with the whole, wide world on this World Communion Sunday, let us hold the loving God in our hearts as this loving God holds us in God's heart.