



18 March 2018

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, 15 and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. 1 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: 2 proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. 3 For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. 5 As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully. (2 Tim. 3:14-4:5 NRSV)

²⁷The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of humans and the seed of animals. ²⁸And just as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the Lord. ²⁹In those days they shall no longer say: "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." ³⁰But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge. ³¹The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. ³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. (Jer. 31:27-34 NRSV)

1

"Dear God, help her to be patient," I prayed as I stood by the hospital bed of a lady itching to get back on her feet after hip replacement.

"Be patient," I said to the teenage girl chomping-at-the-bit to set off to college.

"Don't be in too much of a hurry," I said to the teenage boy eager to grow enough facial hair to shave.

"Patience," I said to the parent worried sick about a son who was more than a little too rebellious.

"Patience," I said to the young girl working so hard to master the violin.

"Patience," I said to the man absolutely apoplectic about what he saw as the lack of moral courage on the part of his elected representatives.

Patience. It's an attitude few of us have in great supply. We want whatever we want today. Whether it be service, competence, understanding, healing, liberation, pleasure, wealth, control, salvation...we don't want it in 12 installments. We don't want it piecemeal. We don't want it years from now. We want it yesterday!

Our impatience in nearly all things manifests itself in some fairly disagreeable behaviors: incivility, road rage, cutting corners, breaking rules... Next time you're in a check-out line and the cashier is in no hurry, watch how people around you react. For that matter, take note of your own reaction.

When it comes to learning something new...say, a foreign language...is it any surprise we are drawn to programs that promise fluency in 30 days? As for the high divorce rate in this country, I would wager impatience is one of the contributing factors in most of those divorces.

We are impatient people...impatient with the incompetence of others, impatient with the limitations placed on us by others, impatient with the lack of limits by which others live, impatient with ourselves...and impatient with God.

2

That said...there are times when impatience, rather than patience, is the appropriate virtue. In April of 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. was behind bars in the Birmingham jail. He had been arrested for peacefully protesting against the laws dealing with segregated busing. From jail he wrote a letter to the white pastors of Birmingham. Why write to them? He knew deep down inside those white pastors had sympathy with King's requests...but they wanted him to go slower. They thought he was going too fast. They wanted him to wait and to be patient. He wanted them to realize why black people in America had waited long enough. The time for being patient was through.

King knew their call for him to be patient was the default advice from the oppressor. To be patient often means accepting the dominating will of another person or persons or customs or institutions.¹ Those who have never suffered from the disease of segregation are not in any hurry to act to change it. By giving a clear explanation of the evils of segregation, King hoped to appeal to what he believed was true - that deep down inside, those pastors knew "right from wrong" when they saw it...and that there were no legitimate reasons to prolong injustice one more minute.

The "#MeToo" and the "Times Up" movements are the result of women standing up and saying the culture of sexual harassment and assault must come to an end...not someday, but now.² There is an impatience at the heart of these movement that is just and right and true. There are no legitimate reasons to prolong the abuse and injustice one more minute.

The National School Walkout this past Wednesday was an effort begun by young people to press lawmakers to pass stricter gun control laws. Falling on the one-month anniversary of the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, this student-initiated effort was and is meant to reinvigorated national debate

over gun control and school safety. It is an initiative that tells lawmakers the time for being patient is through.

When we talk about patience, then, we have to realize there are good and faithful times to be patient...and there are good and faithful times when we should be patient no more.

3

God's people, the people of Israel, found themselves in exile...far from their homes and their heritage...both of which led them to believe they were far from God. The psalmist recorded the moaning of his people, "By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion. How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land..."³ How, indeed!

The Exiles were in a state. They were irritated because they thought they were being unjustly punished for the sins of their parents and grandparents. Jeremiah told them a day was coming when that would no longer be the case - a day when they would no longer suffer for the sins of the parents. That was good news, right? But wait...instead, they would be accountable for their own sins.

Isn't that how these things go? We blame our plight on others and demand they be held accountable. Then when they pay for what they've done we realize we no longer have any cover. Justice means we have to behave...we have to be accountable for our own behavior.

Essentially that is what happened to the second and third generation Exiles. Jeremiah told them they would have to account for their own behavior. But rather than leaving them more disheartened than they were, Jeremiah said God was going to change them from the inside out. God was going to give them new hearts...hearts that would give them a heart for loving God...hearts that would make them more inclined to faithfulness.

I think Jeremiah was telling them a couple of things. First, I think he was saying he was going to replace their standard-issue hearts with new hearts...hearts "on loan" from God, if you will. Since their old hearts seemed inclined toward selfishness, God was going to perform a heart transplant...replacing selfish hearts with God's own heart.

The second thing Jeremiah was telling them was that their part was to remember...to remember their new hearts were in fact cloned from God's heart. If they could remember this, then they stood a chance of bring more attentive to what the heart was and is meant to do. Faithfulness and obedience would no longer be alien concepts and realities. The motivation to love and serve God would flow instinctively from their hearts.

4

Wonder how the Exiles received this news? What would these new hearts be like and feel like? Did the people begin taking their pulse to see if their hearts beat to a new rhythm? Did they watch their friends and neighbors to see if there was something new and different about them...about the way they spoke...about the things they said...about the way they treated people?

And when it seemed as though nothing had changed, when it didn't seem as though they had new hearts...how did they react? In other words, how did they react to

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the delay on delivery of new hearts? Did they choose to be patient? Or did their patience wear thin?

Or...did it slowly dawn on them God had performed transplant surgery already by stealth...that they had new hearts? After all, the new hearts were on loan from God... which means they were not "me" focused. That was one of the flaws in their old hearts... they were focused upon themselves, their feelings, their will-power, their wants, their native strength. In contrast, the new hearts were all about God...about making it possible for them to be God-focused...about helping them focus upon what God-given hearts were leading them to be and think and say and do.

5

No doubt you have figured out it was not just the people of Israel and Judah who needed new hearts. We need new hearts, too.

New hearts make it possible for us to live into a future God has shown us. One contemporary thinker put it this way. She said, "Christians draw their courage and strength from **their memory of the future.**"⁴ That may sound like nonsense. But as people of faith we know the future, don't we? We know it because Jesus described it as a society in which people of all and every stripe live together in harmony. It is an environment in which the law is fulfilled - which is to say, an environment in which our heart-felt aim is to love God with our whole heart and our neighbor with our whole heart, too. It is a world in which God really is our God and we really are God's people.

If, with the help of the Holy Spirit we keep our eyes fixed upon God and the future God has in mind, we will find that our new hearts are working just fine. We will find that a change really has come over us. We will find beating in our chests the sort of patience we need to wait upon God because the future we are waiting for has already begun in us and for us.

At the same time, we will find we are deeply troubled (or is it richly blessed) with impatient. Hearts on loan from God make us impatient with hypocrisy...impatient with institutions that subvert truth...impatient with people who stand in the way of the future we know God wants us all to experience...not just someday, but today.

As we go from here today, may God's Spirit grant us holy patience when that is what faithfulness calls for. And may that same Spirit grant us determined impatience when that is what our God-focused hearts demand. Amen.



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Endnotes:

¹ Capps, Donald. 2000. Deadly Sins and Saving Virtues. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Pub., 85.

² For "Times Up" see <https://www.timesupnow.com/>

³ See Psalm 137:1 & 4

⁴ Russell, Letty M. 1987. Household of Freedom. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 73.