

Rev. Dan Welch Pentecost 13 8-30-20 Text- Romans 12: 9-21

¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. (NIV)

¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. (ESV)

A golfer on a driving range slices another ball and says, "I'm losing my patience! I can't take it anymore!" With that, he quits and walks away, or he walks up to the ball, forgets about proper stance, grip, and swing, and just whacks that ball as hard as he can. I am not a golfer, but I admit to feeling like that sometimes. I know I have lost my patience on more than one occasion. You probably have, too. When that happens, we are on the edge of giving up. Whether it's a job, a relationship, or something else. We've tried too hard for too long, and we're beginning to think that it just doesn't matter anymore, so we do one of two things: we walk away from a situation, or we do whatever we want. Patience is an extremely easy thing to lose.

That's why Paul's words today are a real blessing for us. He shows us that patience is a **gift from God**. It isn't something we have from birth, and it doesn't come naturally to us. Patience is a gift, renewed by God. In the book of Romans, Paul reveals the riches of God's mercies. In the past, we were **enemies** of God, but now, because of Jesus Christ, we are the **people** of God. God's mercy not only forgives our sins, but it also **transforms** our lives (v 1). God's mercy renews our patience in affliction. God's mercy helps us to endure whatever it is that causes our pain and suffering.

Paul knows that when we go through affliction, it's easy to lose patience. After all, he's not talking about the trials of learning to play golf. Paul is talking about the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh waging war against us. These things seek to take away the comfort of our salvation.

Let's face it: Being a Christian is hard. Confessing God's Word to a world that doesn't want to hear it is a difficult thing to do and to **keep** doing. Showing love to one's enemies, holding fast to what is good, practicing mercy, fighting for justice, living in peace with others—these things are hard and, at times, we find ourselves saying, "I'm losing my patience! I can't take it anymore!" We're tempted to give up and walk away or to do as we please. If you've ever found yourself falling into either of those errors, listen to Paul, because he has a word of encouragement for you. God in His mercy renews our patience. Standing firm in His grace, we neither walk away nor do what we want. Instead, we are patient in affliction.

When our patience is tested, the temptation to give up is huge. When we feel that we've had enough with a situation, we're tempted to lay down our arms in

battle, to believe that nothing in this world is worth all this suffering, to feel that no one cares anyway and, therefore, to walk away.

This temptation could have overtaken the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah, as we find him in our Old Testament reading today, was convinced that it was because of God's Word that he's been turned into a laughingstock. That's because Jeremiah prophesies destruction, just as God tells Him to do, but nothing seems to happen. And since being a prophet of doom doesn't exactly lend one to making a lot of friends, he's become very lonely. His loneliness (15:17) leads him to complain and accuse God (15:18) of treating him poorly. Jeremiah grumbles at God saying, "I sat alone because Your hand was on me and You had filled me with indignation, Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable? Will You be to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails?" Jeremiah, the great faithful prophet, begins to question the promises God had made to him. This is a man who is on the edge of giving up.

Yet in the midst of affliction, Jeremiah does **not** walk away. He comes before God in prayer, and in mercy God answers. God responds to Jeremiah's suffering prayer with a promise of steadfast mercy (15:20):

"They will fight against you, but will not overcome you, for I am with you to rescue and save you," declares the LORD.

But it's not just Jeremiah who becomes tempted to give up when afflictions come. The amount of broken and hurting marriages in our land is tragic and heartbreaking. For the Christian spouse who tries to do the right thing, to go to church, to hear God's Word, to receive God's forgiveness and strength through Word and Sacrament; to that person who tries so hard in his or her marriage only to have it fail or be put in serious jeopardy because of their spouse's sin, it's nothing less than devastating. Yet sadly, instead of turning to God for comfort and peace during this devastating time, the temptation is enormous to give up on God, to walk away from Him since He doesn't seem to care.

And yet God, in Christ, has come and endured our trials- all of them. He's suffered for our sin - all of it- and He's opened the way of salvation- to all of us. God's great Good News to us is that because of Christ, He **is** in relationship with us. He invites our prayers, He listens to our cries and our anger when we are in the midst of suffering, and he even gives us His Spirit to intercede for us (Rom 8:26-27).

So in the midst of affliction, whether it's from a long illness, a hurting relationship, a devastating loss, a global pandemic that affects almost every area of life, or anything else, we do not walk away but trust in God's mercy and

we call out to Him in prayer. We are patient in affliction ***by being faithful in prayer.***

Patience in affliction does not take control but rejoices in hope. That's the other major challenge to patience-the temptation to take control.

That's when we want to impose our will on a situation. We rely on our effort to bring an end to the suffering. Yet, earlier in his Letter to the Romans, Paul reveals that affliction in God's hands is part of our growth (5:3-5). In chapter 5 Paul writes, "we ... rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us."

Through the endurance of suffering, we are formed in hope; our eyes are turned from this world to the future glory that is made certain in Christ.

We see how the temptation to take control of the situation overtakes Peter in our Gospel lesson today. When Jesus tells His disciples that He must suffer, die, and be raised to life, Peter is indignant and says "No! This will never happen to you!" Peter and the others didn't understand that Jesus' suffering, dying, and rising is the very reason for His coming to earth. Instead, the disciples try to take control of the situation to make things work the way ***they*** think things should work. So, the Lord opens His disciples minds to the things of God (16:21). He helps them to understand that God's way of doing things is always best, even when we don't understand at first the reason. Jesus reveals how this vision changes the way we live our lives in this world (16:24-25). Rather than be in control of one's life, one lives in hope, ***losing one's life and trusting in the ways of God.***

Paul encourages us to endure our struggles, our afflictions through hope and prayer. We can do this because we ***have*** a certain future. It's been made known to us in the death and resurrection of Jesus. As I always like to say, especially during this year, 'we don't know what the future holds, but we do know the One who holds the future.' Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today, and forever! (Hebrews 13:8) Rejoicing in hope, remaining constant in prayer, we ***have*** patience in the midst of affliction.

What does that look like? Patience in affliction is like walking a tightrope and not falling on either side. In the midst of suffering, we don't walk away and we don't take control of the situation, relying on ourselves. Instead, we trust in God's mercy shown to us in Jesus. He is our lifeline in the midst of affliction. We stand firm in Him, speaking to God in prayer and rejoicing in the hope that He

works all things together for our good. On Christ the solid rock we stand, all other ground in sinking sand. When Paul encourages us to be patient in affliction, he puts that encouragement between two other exhortations: rejoice in hope and be faithful in prayer. For Paul, these three things belong together: patience, hope, and prayer. In the midst of affliction, we remember God's mercies and remain joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer. Amen.