

Fruit of the Spirit: Patience
Matthew 18:21-35
Community Presbyterian Church 2/9/2014
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I want you all to think about this past week. Was there a time when you...
--had to wait in a long line,
--were stuck in traffic,
--were put on hold for what seemed like forever
--or kept in a meeting WAY PAST the time it was supposed to end?
--Were any of you stood up for a lunch date or stuck behind a REALLY SLOW car on that windy road on your way out of town through Plummer (Hwy 3?)

In other words, did any of you have your patience tested?

I bet it was fairly easy to remember an instance like this in your week. But let me ask you this: Can any of you remember a time this week when YOU were on the receiving end of SOMEONE ELSE'S patience?

In other words,
YOUR car was the one holding up all the traffic on Hwy 3...
YOU had to put someone on hold for a really long time...
YOU ran the meeting that went late...
YOU forgot that lunch appointment that kept your friend waiting...

I wonder if it is a whole lot easier to remember when you were inconvenienced and had to be patient than to remember when your actions required another to be patient with YOU...

That's one of the questions that got under my skin from this parable. How often do I/we depend on the patience of others but aren't always ready and willing to dish it out ourselves?

As we look at the fruit of the Spirit called, PATIENCE, may we begin by remembering that we are called to be patient because GOD is patient--God is patient with us!
We get a window into the patience of God in this parable of Jesus.

The parable begins with Peter asking Jesus a question about forgiveness and very quickly we discover that forgiveness and patience go hand in hand.
Just a recap on this word for patience (we talked about it recently during Advent when we focused on James 5)--

makrothumia in the Greek means "large spirit" or "great temperament."
One who has *makrothumia* has a large capacity to bear with frustrations, set backs...
PEOPLE.

If you break the word down,
makro = far off - and *thumos* - fierceness or indignation.
(I used the illustration-)You've heard someone say, "I've had it up to here with you!"(shoulders) or even here (over the head) but someone w/ makrothumia can remain calm for a long time before it sets their fuse.)

So patience is a large capacity to bear with frustration

And patience is being able to hold anger at a distance.

From this description of makrothumia or patience, can you see how it goes hand in hand with forgiveness? bearing w/ someone and holding anger at a distance-- Patience is a necessary precursor to forgiveness.

SO BACK TO PETER'S QUESTION: How many times do we have to forgive someone? Peter offers, 7 times???

Just a window into what he may have been thinking:

Peter probably thinks he's giving a safe number because the required amount in Rabbinic law is 3.

Just before our passage Jesus gives 4 scenarios of when and how to forgive someone.= first go to him one on one, then bring others, then go before the whole congregation with it...

And since Jesus mentions 4 attempts to reconcile Peter may have taken the Rabbinical law number: 3 and Jesus' 4x: and come up with 7.

(I so resonate with Peter's attempt to get this settled! To know when he can say ENOUGH! And move on from whoever it is that's being so difficult .)

But Jesus replies, NO, not 7! Seventy-seven, or 70 x 7!

In other words, you must forgive more times than any amount you could ever keep track of!

More than what could ever make sense to you!

There is never an ENOUGH quotient when it comes to forgiving!!!

And to prove his point, he tells this parable.

The parable, as with every parable, is FULL OF SURPRISES.

The first surprise is how much this servant owes the king.

10,000 bags of gold or 10,000 talents.

1 talent = 15-20 years' salary for a day laborer.

Multiply that by 10,000 and you get 150,000 – 200,000 YEARS WAGES.

IF YOU HAD TROUBLE WRAPPING YOUR BRAINS AROUND THAT NUMBER, THAT IS EXACTLY THE POINT!

The king forgives an astronomical debt!!!

My first thought is, how could someone possibly owe this much to someone else?

What could he have possibly done to wrack up such a debt?

(pause)And I sort of want us to sit in this thought for a moment.

Because the truth is, we're not going to get anywhere into the truth of this parable until we come to grips with the fact that, we, like this servant, are deep in debt to God for all the Lord has done for us.

(--all the good we've been given that we did not deserve,

--all the sins we were forgiven before we even knew we committed them...

--all the things we've done that would ordinarily separate us from a holy and perfect God.

How could we possibly be invited into the Kingdom of one who is good and holy and perfect and requires the same from us?

But the King is generous. He doesn't say "off with their heads!" (which still isn't enough to pay back what he owes...)

WHICH LEADS TO THE 2ND SHOCKER:

When the servant pleads to the King, "Be patient with me!!! I'll pay back everything!"

(Which is of course isn't the least bit true)

The king has patience, the king has pity on him and CANCELS THE ENTIRE DEBT.
Just like that, the servant was scott free.

Do you know what that feels like? To have a huge burden- whether it be... you owe someone something you couldn't possibly pay back, or you did something stupid with horrible, with lasting ramifications... and all of a sudden the weight of guilt and shame and hopelessness... is gone? Poof... nada... the end of all that... and you are free?

Imagine what kind of sleep he was able to have that night. Finally!

No more "what ifs" and "I should've's" crossing his mind.

No more shame and guilt and fear gripping his gut... He (and his family) were free.

That, my friend, is the most amazing feeling in all the world.

That's what God intends for us to know and experience as God's children.

May we never lose sight of the surprise, the shock, the joy of what it means to be forgiven.

May we never lose our sense of gratitude for Gods PATIENCE with us.

The servant in the parable, apparently did.

Or he took the King's gesture for granted

Or he expected the King to be patient with him but didn't think this should have any bearing on how he treats others...

I don't know what was going on with him! Fill in the blank... He needed the money...

And that's the THIRD SHOCK of the parable.

The way the servant, after having received mercy beyond what is imaginable from the King, immediately demands the tiny grain of sand owed to him from HIS own servant.

The poor man says the same exact words in his plea: "Be patient with me! I'll pay it back!"

And the man's like, "No, I don't think so."

Wow. Disconnect. My goodness, what just happened?

The other servants who saw it were outraged. I'm sure those hearing the parable first hand from Jesus were outraged. We, as readers today, are outraged. AND SO IS THE KING. SO IS GOD.

And we hear the lesson that makes sense but is not always taken to heart.

It is certainly not always lived out!

And that is, Jesus forgives us, so that we might forgive others.

Jesus has patience with us, so that we might have patience with others.

It is a lesson that is hard to sink in, EVEN THOUGH WE SAY THESE WORDS AND PRAY THIS PRAYER EVERY SUNDAY: "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (from the Lord's Prayer).

In teaching us that prayer the Lord assumes we would naturally incorporate Jesus' way of love and forgiveness, PATIENCE, with others.

There is so much to grasp regarding this parable.

A couple of thoughts as we close.

(From Stanley Haueras)

1) When Peter asked his initial question that prompted this question...(remember what it was?) How many times must I forgive someone who sins against me?...

His question presupposes that he is the one who has been sinned against.

He assumes that he is in the position of power against the one who has wronged him.

But Jesus' reply teaches Peter that *he is the forgiven one too*.

We are all members of the community of the forgiven. WE'RE ALL IN DEBT to our eyeballs, without the possibility to repay!

2) We are left with this question: Are we really supposed to forgive even the worst offense, even in the cases of severe abuse?

We look at the parable to guide us. The King didn't respond to the servant who didn't forgive with, "that's ok, I forgive you. It doesn't matter." No, the whole point of the parable is that IT DOES MATTER! And there are consequence, ramifications, when we disobey and take God's forgiveness for granted.

But in the end we are called to adhere to last week's passage: The Lord says, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." We leave it up to God to judge, knowing that he will. Which is a hard word for any of us to hear.

3) Peacefulness involves cultivating a humble, forgiving heart toward others.

Remember, everyone has a story. Take a step back from what we think we know to either get the whole story or simply know there's more we don't know. Isn't that what we want others to know about US when we hold up traffic or are late for our lunch date or are slow to pay someone back... There's more to our story too. And the Lord knows that. And he forgives us and is patient with us.