

**Sermon Series: Set Free**  
**Sermon Series: Patience**  
**Psalm 27**

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*Wait for the LORD;*  
*be strong, and let your heart take courage;*  
*wait for the LORD!*

How many of us enjoy waiting? Even the sound of that word – waiting. You know the feeling. They’ve tucked you away in a small room with no windows. You can hear people going and coming in the hallway. Doors opening and closing, muffled conversations. Time passes. More time passes. “Maybe they’ve forgotten that I’m in here?” “Should I open the door?” “Did the nurse tell anyone that I’m waiting?” Or, when you’re running behind for an appointment and every light seems to turn red, and every other car on the road is in your way. You know, they’re conspiring against you to prevent you from getting where you’re going. Waiting can be so painful and patience so difficult to come by. When the water won’t boil, or the week seems to drag on forever, or the line at the checkout seems to be growing and not getting smaller, when the page won’t load, or the little circle thing below the Netflix logo just sits and spins, sits and spins. Dear Lord, why is this so slow? And then there are people whose waiting is profound – waiting for the diagnosis, for that potential employer to call, for word from a loved one saying “I’m ok”, waiting for the child whom you’ve been patiently expecting for 9 long months. Waiting is hard. We are not a patient people and we are becoming increasingly impatient.

An article in *The Boston Globe* claims that our "demand for instant results is seeping into every corner of our lives." The need for instant gratification is not new, but our expectation of "instant" has become even faster. The article states: Retailers are jumping into same-day delivery services. Smartphone apps eliminate the wait for a taxi, a date, or a table at a great restaurant. Movies and TV shows can be streamed from almost anywhere. But experts caution that instant gratification comes at a price: It's making us less patient.... We've come to expect things so quickly that researchers found people can't wait more than a few seconds for something as insignificant as a video of cute puppies to load.

One researcher examined the viewing habits of about 7 million internet users. How long were subjects willing to be patient? Two seconds. After that they started abandoning the site. After five seconds, the abandonment rate is 25 percent. When you get to 10 seconds, half are gone." Half had given up on waiting. The researcher, who spent years developing this study, worries that someday people will be too impatient to conduct studies on patience.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Muther, "Instant Gratification is Making Us Perpetually Impatient," The Boston

Perhaps like some of you I struggle, at times, with patience. I do. Now I'm pretty patient with the big things. I can take the long view with the growth and development of the Church. I've been a pastor for 24 years and the Church has been around for 2,000 years. While I have a sense of urgency that our mission is important and we need to get on with it, I also know that it's not all up to me and that God is working to put all things right even when it seems slow. I know that our spiritual lives are "a long obedience in the same direction." Of course, God can change us in an instant but for most of us it takes a little longer. Growing in the knowledge and love of God is for most of us like water following over a rock. It takes a long time to smooth out the rough edges. So, I can be patient in the big things. But the little things – traffic, lines, internet – their pace can be maddening. It's like they're getting in the way of my progress. And I can be impatient with people as well, and so sometimes I'm not at my best when it comes to patience. That said then, what are to make of Paul's observation that the life we have in Christ includes the freedom to be patient? How is it that patience is a spiritual gift?

J.R.R. Tolkien, author of *The Hobbit* and the *Lord of the Rings*, did not initially set out to write fantasy novels and create an entire world that he called "Middle Earth." He first ventured into his brilliant writing career when he read the phrase "Middle Earth" in an Old English manuscript and it inspired a poem. That was in 1914 and he was only 22. Three years later in 1917, he wrote "The Fall of Gondolin," which was the first story of his fantasy works. Then, 13 years later (1930), he began telling his children a bedtime story about a strange and funny creature called a hobbit. Seven years later his book titled *The Hobbit* was published. The publisher immediately asked Tolkien for a sequel, and 12 years later in 1949 he completed the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. The trilogy was actually published five years later (1954). In other words, from the time Tolkien first saw the phrase "Middle Earth," to the time his masterpiece about Middle Earth was published, it took him 40 years of creative effort. Forty years. Half of a life time. The fruit of patience.

We are called to "wait on the Lord," to be patient with God and to be patient with one another. And we're called to be patient not because waiting is somehow virtuous in and of itself. Rather, we are called to be patient because in so doing we mirror the patience of God, whom we are told is:

*.... merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.  
– Psalm 103:8*

Can you imagine a world in which God's people are characterized by being merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love? What would our homes, much less the world, be like if we cultivated the fruit of holy patience?

We are called to be patient because God is patient, and being made in God's image our patience then points to our conviction that God is at work redeeming, renewing and transforming us and all of creation even when at times it seems painfully slow. In our patience, we point to who God is, and to what God has done and is doing as a way of keeping hope alive and reminding the world that God has not given up on us even if we've given up on God. Our refusal to demand that other people measure up and our patient desire for others to become more fully the people God created them to be, rather than quickly writing them off, is one of the ways we remind the world of God's patient longing and love for all of us. Patience, waiting on the Lord, is a way of humbly acknowledging our own imperfection and trusting that God loves the other and is at work in their life even if it's hard for us to see.

And so, the writer of Psalm 27 will sing:

*Do not hide your face from me.  
Do not turn your servant away in anger,  
you who have been my help.  
Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my  
salvation!*

*Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,...  
I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD  
in the land of the living.  
Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage;  
wait for the LORD!*

Max Lucado writes, "Maybe no one has told you about God's patience and willingness to put up with you! But the Bible says, "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love" (Psalm 103:8 NIV). Stare at the proof of God's patience! Those thousand sunsets you never thanked him for? Those times you used God's name in vain? And those promises: "Get me out of this, and I'll never tell another lie." If broken promises were lumber, we could build a subdivision. Doesn't God have ample reason to walk out on us? And God doesn't. Why? Because "God is being patient with us" (2 Peter 3:9). Patience isn't naïve. It doesn't ignore misbehavior. It's slow to boil. And this is how God treats us. Patience is the red carpet upon which God's grace approaches us!"<sup>2</sup> And God calls us to roll out that red carpet for others so that

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<sup>2</sup> Max Lucado, *A Love Worth Giving*.

grace might abound. We are to wait for the Lord. And we are called to wait in a particular sort of way. Patience does not mean passivity. Rather, it means action defined by God's gracious longing and desire for us and for the world. Waiting on the Lord means anticipating the Kingdom for which we are waiting by living and serving in a way that points to and reflects the Kingdom for which we are waiting.

You know the cathedrals of Europe are amazing for many reasons. Take the Cologne Cathedral. Begun in 1248, it was to be the main place of worship for the Holy Roman Emperors. Construction was halted during the sixteenth century. And the cathedral was finally completed in 1880 according to the original plan —632 years and two months after the turn of the first shovel.

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The freedom of patience is a particular kind of waiting in which we live out the peculiar vocation to which we've been called. We wait like the artisans and craftspeople who constructed works of art and beauty like the Cologne Cathedral that were designed to glorify God and draw people into relationship with their Creator. Think about the countless laborers who day in and day out laid stone, fashioned windows, carved pews and altar railing and furnishings. Think of the weavers who linked together tiny pieces of thread to create beautiful textiles that would adorn a place of prayer and worship. Most of them would never see the final product. And yet they were patiently faithful to the work given to their hands, trusting that what they were about was something larger than themselves. Even though they had only a small part they knew that it was a small part in the much larger work of God. That's how we wait. Not sitting on our hands passively hoping that God will act. But trusting that God is acting in and through us, through our simple, daily acts of faith.

Now some days this is harder than others. When we stand in the shadow of events like the one we saw unfold in Las Vegas this week we rightly ask, "How long, O Lord?" Our patience wears thin and we want God to come quickly and do something now to make things right. Patience in the face of injustice, and violence, and hatred, and sin, doesn't mean offering our thoughts and prayers and then sitting on our hands as if to say, "Well God will sort this out one day." No, we are right to become impatient with a culture of violence where anyone's life is devalued. We should be impatient when we hear of children running to the cafeteria in the morning to eat breakfast because they haven't had anything since lunch the day before. We should be impatient knowing that some 5 million Syrians have been driven from their homes by war and terror.

We should be impatient with an opioid epidemic that is ruining lives and families. Just as our Lord was impatient the day he walked into the Temple and saw the religious leaders taking advantage of those who had come to pray. He didn't sit back and say, "I think I'll wait on the Lord. God will do something about this." No, he raised holy you know what and then he went out into the streets proclaiming the Kingdom, teaching the love of God, healing broken lives, and offering freedom and life.

Patience doesn't mean we do nothing because we know God will sort things out in the end. No, because we know how God will sort things out in the end, and that things are not now as they will one day be, the freedom of patience requires us to engage the world with the humility, and love, and peace of Christ. Patience means faithful waiting by being actively engaged in seeking justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God. Patience as a fruit of the Spirit means that we engage the difficulties, challenges and horrors of this present age trusting that God's Kingdom of justice, peace and righteousness are unfolding. God *is* our light and salvation, the stronghold of our life therefore we patiently seek the realization of God's will in strength and courage knowing that God will act. The freedom of patience means that we commit ourselves every day to following the way of Jesus and his cross. It means that by waiting on the Lord in prayer, and worship, and study, and Christian community, we allow God to cultivate within us a both holy impatience for those things that break God's heart *and* the will to work for those things for which we patiently pray.

And so, we wait on the Lord. Trusting in God's faithfulness and goodness. We wait and we work – living in anticipation of that day when God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. And while we wait and work we also fervently pray - "Come quickly Lord, come." Amen.