

Sunday, December 12, 2021 Advent 3 "Developing a Patient Heart"

Psalms 37:1-7 Galatians 5: 22-23 Matthew 1:18-25

This is the Third Sunday of Advent and we continue our sermon series focusing on Dr. Seuss' "The Grinch who stole Christmas". The Grinch is a mean, hateful character and just despises the people of Whoville because they celebrate Christmas with so much noise, feasting and by singing! He really just does not know what this celebration is about! We also learn that the main reason the Grinch is so mean is because his heart is two sizes too small and not able to care about anything or anyone but himself. Because of this, he makes the goal of his life and the lives of those around him to be as miserable as he is. But there is one part of the story after he steals everything while making his way up Mt Crumpit to dump the sleigh that he thinks about the Whos in Whoville. It is almost dawn and they are just waking up to find out that Christmas is not coming as everything is gone from their homes. The Grinch thinks that they will start crying and he doesn't want to miss that noise. But instead, what does he hear? Singing! The Grinch is surprised about what he hears. And this is when he is overwhelmed by the love, goodness and kindness of the Whos that his heart begins to grow larger. That is, his heart grows four sizes and he ends up being welcomed into Whoville. The Grinch's story is a great example of what is possible when the Spirit of Christ's birth and the transformation of knowing Christ can bring to a person's heart.

Throughout Advent it is our hope that God will enable our hearts to grow and develop so that we will experience Christmas in new ways. Our focus verse found at Proverbs 4:23 will remind us of what we need to do so that our hearts may grow. It states, "Above all else, guard your heart for it affects everything you do." The heart that we need to guard is the 'nefesh'. This includes your soul, self, life, mind, living being, desires, emotions and passion. It is what is and what makes you unique as an individual. What is in your heart is who you are!

As we prepare to welcome Christ into our midst again, we need to prepare our hearts for transformation from the inside out. This transformation includes focusing on purity, passion, patience and peace in our life. The third step is developing a heart of patience. Are you a patient person and how are you patient? Do you mind waiting in line to pay for something you wish to purchase? I do not mind this too much but what bothers me more is when a person is next in line to pay, they then start looking in their wallet or purse for the method of payment- credit card, cash or coupons. This is also true for price matching- have your phone or your flyers ready! You are going to buy something that is what the line is for, why not be ready for this? Patience is something we all have some issues with. One of the things God wants you to check in your

life is a patient heart. Guard your heart like a sentry on duty and letting only good things in. It also means keeping your temper out or under control. How easy it is to lose patience? Years ago I worked in a small store and was learning how to run the cash register while waiting on a customer. The customer was in a bit of a hurry and their patience was running low. I remember that they actually started rapping their fingers on the counter. This really annoyed me, I was learning a lot more than ringing up a sale. To this day, this still annoys me when I see it happening to others who are working and serving others. Be patient! But how do we develop a patient heart?

Our reading from Galatians 5:22-23 describes the 'Fruit of the Spirit' which is the top nine virtues that God wants us to develop in our lives. The passage states that when the Holy Spirit comes into your life, the Spirit will produce this kind of fruit- love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Patience is one of these 'virtues'. Other passages also speak of patience: Psalm 40:1 "I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry." I Corinthians 13:4 "Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; it is not arrogant or rude." And from James 5:8 "You also must be patient. Keep your hopes high, for the day of the Lord's coming is near." There are several other biblical passages that emphasize the need for patience as we interact with others, but one thing that is certain is that patience must be learned throughout our lives. We are called to be patient each and every day. NO matter what we experience each day having a patient heart is key to knowing God and trusting in God's timing. This might be for the right job, to experience a better relationship with another person, and even in this time of waiting for Christmas and what it might mean as we anticipate celebrating Christ's birth.

James 1:3 states "You know that under pressure your faith life is forced into the open and shows its true colours." This pressure could be caused from many influences but in each of these circumstances we are called to be patient as God is teaching you to trust Him= He is enlarging your heart!

There are many situations when our faith is forced outward and we are called to be patient. We might give of ourselves and maybe even become vulnerable to a certain level. One of these situations is as you are growing in your faith. We all start out as infant Christians with a general understanding of God Jesus and the Spirit. But we are called to grow, develop and mature in faith. This is the purpose of our church- to make disciples and grow faithfully together. It takes patience as we are really life-long learners in our faith. Sometimes we get impatient and just want to know more but we can only grow at the stages God enables us to know. Just think

about a baby human. It takes about 9 months for a baby to mature before birth- otherwise we know that infants born premature require extra assistance after birth. In creation there is a wide variety of gestation periods for animals- for opossums, it is just 12 days—hardly time to build a nest. But for an elephant it takes up to 22 months for the baby to mature fully. How patient a momma elephant must be! So when we think of growing in faith, it takes a lifetime to fully develop. In order to grow in faith and to develop a patient heart we need to partner with God. This means that you are not focused on someone else's faith journey but yours; and that you are not focusing on how far you have to go, but on how far you have come.

A second situation when we need to have a patient heart is when we deal with difficult people. Studies show that one in three people might be considered a difficult person. So if you think the person on your left and right are not that difficult to deal with then the third one is you! This need for patience is very true while driving on busy streets. Drivers duck in and out of traffic as lights change from yellow to red and from red to green at almost all intersections. How patient we must be in order to get to our destinations. Barbara Johnson tells us that "Patience is the ability to idle your motor when you feel like stripping your gears." With wisdom and maturity we hold back and then respond. Another way of saying that when it comes to difficult people we need to hold back. We must first vent to God before venting to others. Talking to God and sharing with Him all that is built up in you, helps you to control your tempers and prevents hurtful words to be shared with those whom you care about and work with or see.

A third time when patience is needed, is when we experience losses- of close relationships, dreams and loved ones. At no other time will we find out more about ourselves, our faith and what is going on within us than when experience losses in life. It is then that you need a patient heart. God is working through you and wants you to know that He is not gone away. When and where the new normal arises is unknown, but It takes time and patience to get there. In order to arrive at the new normal our response must be in three parts- weep, wait and connect.

We need to weep that is express our grief to cry to be angry or hurt. But, then you must move to waiting and this takes the most patience as it takes time. In time, you will begin to see God's presence and purpose in the difficult situation. Unfortunately, a lot of people never get passed the first two stages as they disengage in life. The only way to develop a patient heart is to spend time with the loved ones you do have, build new friendships, find something to do that is new. Connect with God more and you will gain peace.

A fourth situation, when patience is needed is when we are called to share our faith. Think about this, how did you hear come to know about Jesus? Someone shared their faith story with you. Patience grows in our hearts when we can share our faith with others. They may not respond immediately but you are planting seeds for the future. You share your faith and by doing this you are sowing seeds for the future. This is what we have been doing here at Glenwood with our drive thru drop off for the Mission, with book sales, with our Tinsel and Tears service, and even sharing the story of the new United Church Crest on the freshly painted Christian Education building. By the telling our faith stories we are sowing seeds. Just like planting seeds in dirt, we need patience for all these to grow. Kirkgaard a Danish philosopher stated, "Patience is necessary and one cannot reap immediately where one has sown." As Christians, we need to be patient with other people. We can tell the story of Jesus birth- and this is a great story of a precious baby born in a stable. We might even talk about Jesus' disciples and teachings. But for some people to even mention Jesus death on the cross for our sakes so that we will be forgiven of sin is just too much to handle- in this moment. But there will come a time with patience that the message of Christ's death and his resurrection will make a difference.

And it does make a difference! Jesus was very patient—how many times does it say in the gospels that the disciples did not understand who he was nor his purpose? He did not stop. He carried on and fulfilled his purpose.

We are to live out our lives; to develop a patient heart and to know that it will take time to learn, grow and understand who we are as Christ's followers. But as the Grinch heard the Whos singing, something changed within him. His heart was opening up to the Spirit moving that morning in Whoville. This same Spirit is moving amongst us in this moment, too!

Today we will share in the sacrament of Holy Communion as we do what Jesus asks us to do in remembrance of Him. We will eat and drink as he taught; and we will remember his death. We will also remember why He came to earth, and that it is because of His resurrection that we celebrate his birth and give thanks to God for his love.

Let us pray. God, we pray that you would open our hearts and reveal to us our passions. Help us to be patient and willing to tell your story of love and of Jesus' birth, death and resurrection. Search us O God and lead us in your way evermore. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen