Fruits of the Spirit- Patience

Galatians 5:13-26

Jonah 1:1-17

To the churches of the Nebraska Synod, all the way from the edge of Iowa, to the corner of Colorado and from South Dakota down to Kansas, I write to you this day from the Office of the Bishop of the Nebraska Synod, to talk about the work that is ahead of us.

Galatians 1:3-7 Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever! Amen. I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are following a different gospel— not that there really is another gospel, but there are some who are disturbing you and wanting to distort the gospel of Christ.

Oh, my, that took a quick turn didn’t it? Paul digs write into the heart of the matter, because in the ministry we do, we don’t have time to mess around. There is much work that we need to be doing.

Remember, that Paul and the disciples were sent out into the mission field to spread the Gospel, and Paul was relentless in his work. He would go from town to town preaching and teaching to set up small outposts of the Gospel all through the land. Then he would continue on preaching I and teaching in other areas, but checking back in to see how all the outposts of the Gospel were doing. Much like I’m doing now, he would write back and talk about the areas that the missions had struggles or needed to have more conversation. We can tell from the short introduction and the quickness with which Paul starts to admonish the community, that there was some problems happening in the outpost of Galatia. So Paul brings it to the attention of the community so that they can work on it together.

As others have already noted, this passage from Galatians is how we can bring the gifts of the community together to work for the mission of God. The first three fruits are logical and reasonable for the work of the community, as a community we are called to a place of “love, joy and peace” but then we receive one of the radical reorientations of the Gospel, we are called to “patience.”

If we look back from he very beginning, God has generously gifted his people with a place of respite, a sabbath to stop our work and see what will come of it. For thousands of years the church has been working on growing our patience, with each other, with ourselves and with God. Since, we’ve been working with it all this time, we’re probably good at it by now, right?

I once heard a teacher say that her students were great with patience, as long as it happened immediately. It’s an area of our work that I struggle with, I like this teacher’s students have bought into the culture of “right now”. But, if we can’t even slowdown to give God the space to lead, how can we know where we are going?

How can we flip this idea of patience being something we have to work on, into a space that we get to live into? Sometimes in our home, we have times that are called “mandatory fun” and that everyone must participate. I wondered if God ever did that with patience, does God ever create time for mandatory patience? A time when we get to work through our anger, grief or daily business and just turn back to God? Immediately the story of Jonah came to mind.

We all know the story, Jonah was running from God because he didn’t want to do the work that God needed him to do. So he puts on his traveling clothes and gets on a boat to get far, far away. But God continues to remind Jonah of the ministry he is called to, and God starts to rock the boat. Then the waves get more and more violent, to the point that the sailors are worried about their own survival. When Jonah comes up and declares that he is a follower of the one true God, and that he is the cause of their pain. From there he tells them one of the most shocking lines of the story, he said to them, “pick me up and throw me into the sea so that the sea will calm down for you, because I know it’s my fault you are in this severe storm.” And the rest of the story is the bits of Vacation Bible School and cheerful songs about how Jonah, was given a time of quiet and contemplative mediation, right in the acidic and disgusting innards of a fish. Only in places were God is working can a smelly whale belly be a place of respite and solace. In the violence of the storm, the only way that Jonah sees to move the others forward, is for he himself to give up all he has and fully trust in God’s work. Isn’t that the best definition of patience? To trust so fully in God’s action that you know there is nothing you can do but to be ready for God’s next action.

Who am I kidding? Jonah was in a smelly fish for days… it sounds like he might be just as stubborn as I am at times. I wonder if God has ever wanted to stop me in my tracks and force me to reevaluate the ministry in which I’m a part? In the most stubborn and sinful of my human ego days, this might be the only real way God can move my heart into a new place.

Patience, to see the place I’m in as holy.

Patience, to let God work on God’s own time.

Patience, to see each new day as a possibility of what God can do.

What does this look like for you? Where are the moments of your day that you need to breath and let God work in God’s own time, so that you can work on your own time? And even if we can define those areas, how dos one work on growing their patience? Did Jonah have more patience for those he was with than he did for himself?

We are in a time in which there is so much trauma that we are living with that I don’t know if we can even compute the pain as it comes into our systems. Across the board, this is resulting in more depression and anger as the pain is turned inward and then reflected out. Are we taking the time to have enough patience with ourselves? We are hyper critical of everyone else, probably because we’ve been stuck at home and needed some view outside our own homes. But where do we go from there? Where do we take that pain and hurt and have space to breath? How can we be patient with ourselves if we can’t even find space to catch our breath, much less take deep breaths?

Sometimes I catch myself having more space for grace in others than I do with myself. When other’s pain comes out at me, I’m pretty good at saying, “they must be working through a lot right now.” But when my anger comes out, I immediately think that I need to do better, and process through this more quickly. But each of our realities is that we all need time to process our grief at our own speed. I wonder what it would be like to have a little more patience with my own heart this week.

I wonder if that was what Jonah struggles with as he sat in the belly of the fish. Was he worried about things outside himself or did he take the time to work on what was going on in his own space? What does it look like if you slow down to take some time to be patient and think about what is going on in your on space, your own body? If we ignore ourselves, and turn to help others, we’re just pushing off our own healing and not able to fully embrace the needs. But if we give ourselves the space, we can work on ourselves before we turn and help others. Isn’t this what the community needs? Strong healthy leaders ready to bring hope to a painful world?

This week can you find some space to have patience with yourself before you go out and do the ministry of the church?