**God, Grant Me Patience, Now!**

**First Presbyterian Church**

**Pittsford, NY 14534**

**December 11, 2016**

**3rd Sunday in Advent**

1. On the drive to Grandma’s house, Johnny pipes up from the back seat asking, “is Santa bringing me a puppy for Christmas?”
   1. His parents glance amusedly at one another and answer,
      1. “Well, you certainly have been a good boy this year.
      2. We hear your teacher saying you are doing very well with your reading, writing and arithmetic.
      3. We see you being kind to your grandparents, little sister, and friends here in the neighborhood.
      4. You do a marvelous job of listening to what we say.”
   2. Johnny scratches his head and says, “thanks, I think.”
      1. “But am I getting a puppy?”
   3. Did you catch the parent’s ambiguous answer?
      1. Their response was about as direct as the ambiguous answer Jesus gave John’s disciples when they asked the Christ, “are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”
         1. Jesus replies, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."
2. The Psalmist and Isaiah, distant from the arrival of a savior, are certain of his coming and exuberant in their hope.
   1. James and Matthew, living many years later in difficult times and experiencing fear and uncertainty, counsel patient endurance.
   2. As Christians, we are invited to embrace both realities—to believe joyfully that Jesus is present in our lives and showers us with his love, and at the same time to understand that our human experience, like that of Mary and Joseph as they make their way to Bethlehem, presents us with choices and challenges.
   3. The journey is not easy, the outcome uncertain, and it requires of us faith, persistence, and above all, patience.
      1. Patience is what I want us to consider this morning.
3. Advent is pregnant with expectation.
   1. We hear it in Mary’s voice as she sings the portion of Luke’s text that we know as the Magnificat: my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior.
   2. We expect so much in this Season – of ourselves, of one another, and of the world around us.
   3. And our expectations are often for a storybook Currier & Ives level of perfection that is far from realistic.
      1. Whose life is neatly wrapped and tied up with a bow?
   4. To make matters worse, we live in an age of instant gratification, from fast food to fast data, and we are increasingly unwilling to abide with ambiguity.
      1. It’s why we have people at Disney World paying for a pass so they don’t have to wait in line.
      2. Or people who don’t mind paying for things like same-day delivery.
      3. We’ve come to expect certainty and resolution so quickly that researchers found people can’t wait more than a few seconds for a video to load.
   5. The Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project sums up a recent study about people under the age of 35 and the dangers of their hyper-connected lives with what sounds like a prescription drug warning: “Negative effects include a need for instant gratification and loss of patience.”
4. We know the proverbial saying: patience is a virtue.
   1. But what do we mean by patience?
   2. There are two basic kinds of patience: the first kind adds to our skills and the second kind adds to our sanity.
      1. First, adding to our skills:
      2. Think of the motto: Practice makes perfect
         1. The woodworker carves or finishes furniture;
         2. The jeweler repairs a broken clasp or resets a ring;
         3. The quilter or knitter stitches a personal gift;
         4. The accountant runs trial balances to make certain of accuracy;
         5. The student repeats and memorizes math tables, grammatical declinations, or foreign languages;
         6. The musician repeats arpeggios (and sounding joys);
         7. The golf pro empties buckets of balls;
         8. The hockey, soccer, lacrosse and tennis players skate, shoot, throw and hit into nets;
         9. All these skills require patient practice.
            1. If we don’t do something regularly or long enough, we convince ourselves we are not good at a growing list of things.

The piano is never learned.

The athletic competition is never won.

* + - * 1. If we aren’t patient with our practice skills, we deprive ourselves of the joy of a creative venture and the friendships we might have made in doing it.

We never discover and express the artist, athlete, or scientist God gifted us to be.

* + 1. The second kind of patience adds not just to our skills but to our sanity.
       1. This patience comes from waiting when one is powerless to change an ambiguous situation:
          1. getting that first job and finding that you are competing with others equally talented and not getting ahead as fast as you expected;
          2. finding the one you think may be your life partner and discovering that while you share many things, you also have some major differences;
          3. learning that someone you love has a complicated illness that may or may not resolve itself anytime soon;
          4. finding that your teenager seems dead set against doing homework, completing chores, or getting to bed on time.
  1. This sanity-saving patience is a life skill.
     1. When uncertainty and ambiguity confront us, if we respond with anxiety and fear, we often take the wrong action too soon:
        1. We may become disenchanted with that first job and never find a satisfying career;
        2. We may blame our partner as being thick-headed and lose out on a remarkable relationship;
        3. We may waste the last days with a loved one challenging a doctor's approach rather than engaging in deep and meaningful conversation with the dying;
        4. We may erode a child's sense of being appreciated and loved so that he goes through life seeking the approval of others.
     2. Impatience is the seedbed of despair.
        1. Despair looks back and sees nothing.
        2. Despair looks forward and sees never.
     3. Patience is the seedbed of hope.
        1. Patience looks back and sees providence.
        2. Patience looks forward and trusts God.
        3. Most importantly, patience sees the present as the joy of becoming who God made us to be.
  2. Jesus was patient with his disciples, not to mention John’s disciples and the crowds who followed them.
     1. The disciples were sometimes thickheaded, lazy, selfish, and slow to believe.
     2. Even from a merely human standpoint, we can see how frustrating they must have been for Jesus.
     3. Despite Jesus' miracles and words of wisdom, the disciples were focused upon themselves and wavered in their belief about who he was.
     4. Yet do we find him railing at his disciples over their foolishness and stupidity?
        1. Or making fun of them when they make mistakes?
     5. Notice that Jesus' refusal to complain about his irritating disciples can be described as an exercise of self-control.
        1. Surely he would have been justified in blistering them with insults.
        2. His omniscience guaranteed that every possible joke and embarrassing remark was at his disposal on any occasion.
           1. This makes his self-control even more admirable.
     6. His refusal to complain also involves humility, the conscious decision to lower himself by not exercising his right, as the holy man he was, to judge and dismiss his friends because of their faults.
        1. We might even say this is a form of mercy.
     7. Jesus' refusal to complain about his disciples is generous.
        1. Even with their vice and thick-headedness, he remained no less committed to them and served them increasingly as their failures became more outstanding.
  3. Occasionally he does remark that his disciples are slow to believe, or he asks rhetorically how long they will fail to have faith in him, but these are always appropriate reminders about just what was at stake for them.
     1. These were fitting and useful rebukes, not petty venting.

1. What would the situations I described earlier look like if we responded with the kind of patience Jesus models?
   1. The young professional finds a mentor who helps hone her skills to contribute to the enterprise and accept growing responsibilities;
   2. The person who has major differences with a possible life partner explores these areas without judgment and finds common ground;
   3. The caregiver of somebody with a complicated illness utilizes a network of resources to sustain compassionate care and maintain the loved one’s dignity;
   4. The parent offers tools, sets boundaries and frees the teenager to experience natural consequences until the teenager is motivated to improve his own choices.
2. Father Henri Nouwen writes, "Patience is not waiting passively until someone else does something.
   1. Patience asks us to live the moment to the fullest, to be completely present to the moment, to taste the here and now, to be where we are.
   2. When we are impatient, we try to get away from where we are.
   3. We behave as if the real thing will happen tomorrow, later, and somewhere else.
   4. Be patient and trust, Nouwen says, that the treasure you are looking for is hidden in the ground on which you stand."
   5. Thriving, rather than merely surviving, requires patience, not only with the Lord who will return in God’s own time, but with each other, lest we destroy the community that holds us up in hope while we are waiting.
3. Advent is of its nature a time of uncertainty and ambiguity, taking place this year in an uncertain and ambiguous world.
   1. Our human response to ambiguity can include unease, fear, and impatience.
   2. We find it difficult to wait.
      1. We are tempted to fall into despair.
      2. We weaken or lose altogether our ability to hope.
      3. But Scripture offers us a better path.
4. Let us use the Advent season this year to practice the virtue of patience modeled in Scripture, so that we may better find our way in a confusing environment and restore hope to those around us, as we await the coming of the Christ Child.
   1. And who knows?
      1. Johnny just might get that puppy.