

October 8, 2023 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

Thank God for His Loving Patience

He tried and tried and tried and tried. How many times would you try at something before you gave up? 10 times? 100 times? 1000 times? Thomas Edison figured out how to make a lightbulb, but he could not figure out what would be best for the filament, the part inside the bulb that glowed. He tried coconut fiber, fishing line, hair, boxwood, hickory, cedar, flax, to name a few. Depending on how you count, he tried from 1600 to 2774 different items as filaments, but they only burned for a few hours. Finally, 144 years ago this month, he tried carbonized bamboo and it burned for 1200 hours. It took Edison a lot of patience, but he finally developed a practical lightbulb. This morning, we see that God is patient too. In fact, we could even call his patience reckless and we thank God for his loving patience.

The setting here in Matthew 21 is Tuesday of Holy Week, the last day that Jesus taught in the temple. Most of the Jewish leaders hated Jesus and were plotting to kill him. Even though they wanted to kill him, he wanted to save them. This was his last chance to reach out to them. They needed to hear the truth that rejecting him meant eternal suffering in a very real hell. If he simply told them that, however, they would bark back in anger. So Jesus told a story to draw them in and lead them to recognize the truth by themselves.

A man owned some land and built a beautiful vineyard. He built a wall around it to keep wild animals out. He built a watchtower so someone could sit up high and guard against any thieves. There was an expensive winepress where the grapes could be crushed and the juice collected. Then the owner rented the vineyard to some farmers while he went away to take care of other business. The farmers would take care of the vineyard, sell the grapes and enjoy a profit. Of course, a good deal of the grapes would go to the owner who owned and prepared the vineyard.

When it was time for the harvest, the owner sent some servants to collect what the farmers owed him. When the servants arrived, the farmers refused to pay. In fact, they beat up one of the servants, killed another in cold blood and pummeled another with large stones. The owner could have had those farmers arrested, instead he patiently sent more servants hoping to get different results, but the farmers did the same things to them. The owner had every right to send in a SWAT team, instead he decided to send his son, thinking that the farmers would respect him and pay their rent. No earthly owner would tolerate such disobedience. Jesus goes beyond what is reality to point out how foolish the wicked are and how loving the Father is. When the farmers saw the son coming, though, they figured that if the son was gone, then they would get to keep the vineyard as their own. So they dragged him out of the vineyard and killed him.

After telling the story, Jesus asked the Jewish leaders (:40), **“When the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?”** They replied (:41), **“He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants.”** The farmers would not get to keep the vineyard as they hoped. With their answer, the Jewish leaders condemned themselves. In the story, the vineyard represents God’s kingdom where he lives and works in people’s hearts through faith. A vineyard as God’s kingdom is a common illustration throughout the Bible as we saw in this morning’s Old Testament lesson from Isaiah. God, the owner, gave the Jewish nation his Word and the promise of a Savior. They enjoyed blessings that no other nation enjoyed. God had every right to expect to receive fruit from them. The fruit he wanted was faith, simple trust in the heart which showed itself in holy lives.

When the Jews rejected God and turned their backs on him, God had every right to destroy them. Instead, in patient love, he sent his servants, the prophets, to reach out to them in love. The Jews, however, rejected God’s prophets. For example, Isaiah and Jeremiah were abused. Elijah was hunted down. Zechariah was killed. Finally, in loving patience, God sent his one and only son, Jesus Christ. His words and his works let people know that he was true God, the promised Savior. But the Jewish leaders did not want Jesus as their Savior. They thought that they were good enough to get into heaven on their own. They did not want to admit that they were sinful and needed a Savior, especially the son of a carpenter from Nazareth. They did not want to give up their power, prestige and pride.

Jesus pointed out their sins and pleaded with them. He even quoted an Old Testament prophecy from Psalm 118 which said that the promised Messiah would end up crushing everyone who opposed him. He explained that they were not going to get into heaven and that other nations would enjoy the blessings of salvation. It was tough love that they needed to hear. How patiently Jesus dealt with them even though they were plotting to kill him. Sadly, he warned them, but they constantly rejected him.

Jesus was right when he said that the blessings of salvation would be given to other nations. By and large, Jews today have no concept of sin and salvation through a Savior. Their entire religion is all about nationalistic pride and tradition, preserving their culture. The blessings of salvation, however, have been given to others, like you and me. By God’s grace, God’s kingdom has come to us. We have God’s very words and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper through which God touches us individually with his love. God made us his own people. We enjoy his blessings which he gives us for free. When you were baptized, God put his name – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – on you. You are a prince or princess in his kingdom. You will inherit eternal life in heaven!

Jesus was reaching out in patient love to those Jewish leaders 2000 years ago, but the Holy Spirit made sure to preserve this parable so we can learn from it and apply it to ourselves today. God has given us greater privileges than he even gave his Old Testament people. We have a completed New Testament. We can see the victorious and triumphant Christ, who rose from the dead and lives. The Old Testament people only knew the prophecies. We have all the details of salvation revealed to us of how Jesus lived, died, rose and ascended. We have seen how the Lord kept his promise to preserve the good news of salvation in spite of persecution and heresies. We have greater access to God's Word than any other generation in the history of the world. We enjoy the freedom to worship Jesus and we can talk about Jesus openly with others. What more could we hope for? Jesus can also expect us to give him a healthy harvest. He can expect to see faith in our hearts which shows itself in our lives.

The Jews persecuted and killed the prophets that God sent to them. We have not persecuted and killed any prophets. We just ignore them. Can you even recite the books of the Bible? When is the last time you read through a good section of the Bible? Some people say, "The Bible is too confusing for me to understand." Others say, "I'm not into reading." Or, if you read your Bible, do you rush through it like some sort of chore (like washing dishes), then quickly close your Bible and set it aside. Or, do you ponder and pray about what you read and apply it to your life? And even if you do all that, do you always live it day after day? We can't. We are infected with sin which keeps spilling out in our lives.

Some people have told me, "I'm too busy." Really? Are you too busy to watch a Packers game or your favorite TV show? Are you too busy to scroll through endless emails and Facebook posts? Do we come to church with the joyful anticipation of spending time with Jesus? Or, do we view church attendance as some burden? When you entered church this morning, did you look at the altar and smile that's there's no Communion today thinking, "Good, maybe we'll get out early." Or, do we crave the Sacrament where God touches us one on one? Do our words and actions always let the world know that Jesus is more important to us than anything else in the world? Do our lives overflow with fruits of love for God and others that let everyone know that we believe in Jesus? Not always.

Jesus told us to be perfect life our Father in heaven is perfect. We are far from perfect. Indeed, when the world looks at us, it does not always see shining saints. What the world often sees are people who get so focused on the things of this world that the things of God get pushed aside. We often worry and complain as if there was no loving God watching over us. There are times when God must be frustrated with us like a coach gets frustrated with his players who don't always try their best. It's good for us to see here in Matthew 21 that God is lovingly patient with us. Just as he kept sending prophets to his Old Testament people, the Lord keeps offering his Word to us. Like a loving mother patiently urges her child to eat his vegetables, the Lord patiently offers his Word to us. If the Bible seems too confusing for you, we have simplified versions of the Bible in our

library along with a whole bunch of quality commentaries you can trust. If you are not into reading, there are free Bible apps for your phone that will even read the Bible to you. You simply listen. There are lots of other resources for connecting with God's Word at wels.net or timeofgrace.org. If you want other resources, talk to me later.

Even though we often waver in our faith, God's patient love for you is constant. He can not stop loving you. He said (He 13:5), "**Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.**" St. Paul explained (2 Tim 2:13), "**If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.**" Jeremiah reminded us in Lamentations 3 that God's mercies are new every morning. If someone disappoints or disobeys us again and again and again, we eventually lose our patience with them, don't we parents, grandparents, teachers? But God will never lose his patience with you. God will not give up on you even if you commit a sin once, or 10 times or 100 times or more. God will keep waiting patiently for you to recognize your sin and look to him for forgiveness. His mercy endures forever. The Apostle Paul used to hate Jesus and persecuted Christians. He called himself the (1 Tim 1:16), "**worst of sinners,**" and yet he could say that God displayed his "**unlimited patience**" to him and converted him. Jesus kept reaching out to the Jewish leaders right up to the end of his life. St. Peter explained that God is keeping the world going and letting some people live longer just so that they have more opportunities to hear the gospel; (1 Peter 3:9), "**God is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**" The Lord demonstrated his loving patience, not just by sending prophets to share his Word, but especially by sending his Son to suffer and die for us who so often disappoint him. Jesus patiently suffered on the cross, never lashing out in anger or complaining. He patiently suffered until every sin was forgiven. You are safe. You are secure. You are saved!

Thankful for God's patience, we will patiently wait for him to take us to heaven, as we do our best to give God the fruit he is looking for. Every day, we will recognize our sins and rejoice in our forgiveness. We will spend quality and quantity time with God's Word. Every day, we will hold on to him as our Savior and share his love with others. Every day, we will thank God for his loving patience. Amen.