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Abington Presbyterian Church

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Isaiah 40:27-31

Colossians 3:12-17

DESIGNER CLOTHES: PATIENCE

Today we have gotten to the concluding sermon in this five-week series based on imagery referring to a list of qualities with which we as people of faith are urged to adorn ourselves. Thanks for your patience as we have explored what our designer, God, deems among the best qualities for us to wear. From our reading in the third chapter of Colossians, we have focused on the qualities of: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and now we turn to patience. There are those who say it is dangerous to pray for the quality of patience as they express concerns about the means God would use to help it grow within us. We don't want to have to go through the experiences for which we would need patience. But it is a Christian quality with which we are called to adorn our lives and patience is something that meets our needs. Rather than just dealing out difficulties to give us hard lessons, God many times shows us patience as part of the way for us to grow into it.

One place we need patience is in our relationship with God. First, we should take note that God has been patient with us. When we have repeatedly turned our backs on divine guidance, God did not walk away from the relationship. Heavenly patience has been demonstrated through extravagant mercy and more. We might tend to think that God gets everything God wants. But when it comes to our response to what God has done for us, that is not the case. And in life, we don't get all of what we want or expect either, at least not on our desired timetable.

So, what do we do? Our passage from Isaiah challenges us to wait on the Lord, which is a mindset, a soul-set that goes beyond just the feeling of patience or impatience. The focus is more of a confidence, a sense of peace that God is trustworthy and cares about our situation. When we have a need, God is not oblivious to it. It is fine to pray for a resolution to the need, but we are called to wait on the Lord, and not just to wait for the resolution in the form we are seeking.

Sometimes, the way forward will come through a different route than the specific one we are seeking. As we wait, we still move forward as we work that part of the problem which is within our control, exploring which door God might open. Sometimes Isaiah indicates we will be able to move at a pace as if we had wings like eagles. At times it will be like we can run like the Olympic athletes and not be weary. But at other times, we might be able to do no more than walk and try not to faint. God wants to sustain us for such a journey. Part of what God provides is a patient realization that there are certain things over which we have limited control.

Even as the Apostle Paul in the third chapter of the epistle told the Colossians of the importance of them exhibiting patience, we hear in the fourth chapter that he is writing from a jail cell. Multiple times he had been arrested for urging people to worship a God other than the Roman emperor. Perhaps Paul is preaching also to himself a bit as he urges the Colossians to adorn themselves with patience. I'm sure he had been praying to be released from jail so he could resume his travels to proclaim the gospel. But while praying, waiting on the Lord in his case meant he would also write to the churches he had already helped to establish. He was doing all he could to carry out his calling. Did he feel patient? I sort of doubt it. But he was seeking to carry out what God wanted him to do, praying for a way to move forward, using alternative means to reach his goal, and not giving in to despair – that's pretty good for being clothed in patience!

The quality of patience that God really wants us to wear goes beyond simple feelings to faith practices. In the face of frustration, challenges, or suffering, patience refuses to stop seeking to discern God's will and timing and way forward. It may call for an adjustment in expectations, an awareness of what is urgent and what is not, but it refuses to stop believing in God's goodness and love. And it seeks to reflect that goodness and love to others who have wronged or hurt us in some way. We can grow in our capacity for patience when we deal effectively with the stress, anxiety, or grief within us. We can be more patient toward God and others when we also try to be patient with ourselves, as God continues to form us and equip us to carry out our calling as followers of Jesus Christ.

I am sure that Jesus got frustrated with his followers at times. They often misunderstood his purpose and his ways. They were much less generous of heart than he was. Even as he had many occasions to forgive them, he could do so because he patiently loved them, and never gave up on them, ever helping them to grow in positive relationship with God and neighbor. Even as we seek to practice patience when going through a difficult time, as we persevere in prayer, we are called to keep on doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God. (Micah 6:8) Jesus came to bring about the reign of God, the emergence of peace and light, justice and joy for everyone. We wait and watch and practice patience as faithful disciples, knowing that all things are in God's care and in God's time. But as followers of Christ and practitioners of his ministry, we are not passive – we are even called to be passionate! Patience helps us keep pursuing love over hatred, light over darkness, good over evil, hope over despair.

Throughout this series, we have been focusing on the verse from Colossians which says, “As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.” This combination of qualities shapes how we show forth our faith in our lives. And I dare say, that if we continue to seek to grow in these qualities, God's Spirit will patiently continue to nurture us in that growth.

Listen again to our reading from Isaiah, this time with some slight additions: Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God”? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength (in compassion), they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run (with kindness) and not be weary, (in humility and meekness) they shall walk and (with patience) not faint. May God continue to renew us and clothes us in these ways, moving forward. Thanks be to God. Amen.

