

‘Patience, Mercy, Encouragement’
Rev. Dr. Ann C. Kemper
April 3, 2016

based on Acts 5:27-32 and John 20:19-31

Patience, Mercy, and Encouragement. Wouldn’t the world be a better place if we human beings could exhibit some of those divine attributes in our daily lives??

I think we do ok with ‘encouragement.’ That’s the easy one...although there may be a reason it comes after patience and mercy.

If we want, we could turn those three words into a Trinitarian model...without being too much of a heretic.

God is patient.

Christ is merciful.

The Holy Spirit is encouraging.

But a true Trinitarian wouldn’t assign an attribute, but interchange them with each person of God.

This is the Sunday after Easter...and we claim to be Easter people transformed and changed by the resurrection! That means we claim those divine attributes as ours!

As God is patient, we are patient.

As Christ is merciful, we are merciful.

As the Holy Spirit is encouraging, we are encouraging.

We believe the living God is inside us, works through us, around us, above us, behind us...and yes, in spite of us.

Our living God transcends time. By faith we are infused into God’s new timeline; a timeline that draws us into being active (not passive) instruments of God’s grace.

In this first Sunday of the Easter season we find ourselves embedded in God’s new timeline. We look back to the resurrection as a life-changing event...we find ourselves in the midst of a present moment wondering what that might mean for us...and we are mindful that the future holds untold wonders as believers of the resurrection!

Past, present and future co-mingle...each one impacting the other.

One of my favorite movies (Kung fu Panda) has a character called Oogway.

Oogway is a wise old turtle who helps usher in peace and serenity by selecting a very unlikely hero in a panda named Po. During one of their training sessions, Oogway tells Po, “There is a saying: yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, but today a gift...that is why it is called present.”

That is what today is: a present. A gift from God for the traditions and wisdom of the past co-mingling with an exciting new creation the future holds for us.

...and the best way to fully appreciate today’s gift is in the daily practice of patience, mercy and encouragement.

That is the way we know Christ lives! Through us and through *our* practice of those divine attributes.

How many of us are good at being patient?

How many of us exercise mercy generously and regularly?

How many of us sacrifice our own egos in order to encourage others?

Those are virtues that have the power to change the world...and yet they are some of the hardest to live into.

Last Sunday we celebrated the resurrection. We celebrate it as a past event, a present reality, and a future promise.

What the resurrection should mean for each one of us is that our lives change (or should change) every single Easter. We should be striving for perfection in patience, mercy and encouragement.

John Wesley (our Methodist founder) believed perfection in holiness was possible. You and I might scoff at the idea, but he didn't ground that belief in some pie-in-the-sky conviction...he grounded it in scripture!

One thing is true...we will never get close to perfection if we don't keep trying and striving.

Patience. Mercy and Encouragement.

In today's Gospel reading the disciples are huddled in an upstairs room.

The past events shocked them into to be afraid. The present situation was incomprehensible...and the future was uncertain.

But it was in their doubt, fear, and wavering faith that Jesus appeared to bring them a sense of peace and encourage them with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Doubt, fear and wavering faith can only be overcome by patience, mercy and encouragement. That is what the resurrected, living Christ did for the disciples and what the resurrected, living Christ can do for us.

Peter never did waver from that moment he was forgiven by his risen Lord. Indeed, it was the early church that built its foundation on the solid faith of Peter. Neither imprisonment, beatings, or ridicule would sway Peter from speaking out of the power of Jesus' ministry to change the world.

It was Peter and those early disciples who knew they "must obey God rather than any human."

I'm not saying we have to be thrown in jail, or beaten up and left for dead, or suffer rebuke and scorn in order to claim our faith in Christ.

But I do question whether or not we have been unwittingly swayed by:

- materialism
- consumerism
- greed or selfishness
- short-sightedness
- fear of the outside world
- doubt about what really makes us feel secure
- wavering connections to other people for support and love?

How do we honestly hold ourselves accountable to the righteous path and not stray down the unrighteous one?

We don't do it alone. We rely on God *and* we rely on one another.

That means if we seek patience, mercy and encouragement from God, then we need to learn to seek it from one another...and exhibit it ourselves!

In our struggle to remember and learn from the past; live fully into the light of Christ in this moment; and invest wisely in the outcomes of the future...it depend on all of us to be accountable and connected to one another.

That may be hard for us independent, 21st century Americans to accept...but it wasn't so hard for those early disciples...huddled together for comfort and support.

The church cannot survive as a stand-alone entity. As a matter of fact, the very word: church...is not singular. We may be a single congregation called Covenant, but we are one of many in the name and body of Christ.

Patience, mercy and encouragement are the fruits of group dynamics that help us to remember the past, live in the present, and build the future.

...and the best way to bear that fruit is through patience, mercy and encouragement...just as God is patient, merciful and encouragement to us.

Thanks be to God!

Let us pray:

Patient, merciful and encouraging God...gather us into your loving arms and encourage us as we strive to live lives worthy of the resurrection. By the power of your Holy Spirit help us to share with others the amazing gift of Jesus.

Help us to see the many ways the resurrected Christ appears to us! Slow us down. Open our eyes...and inspire us to be courageous and kind; helpful and gentle; and most of all...patient...seeking your will first before barreling through with ours.

We pray today for your merciful ways to forgive us when we doubt your power to work through us. We pray for your encouragement when we fail or give up...praying you never give up on us.

We pray for this church as we come together in praise and worship. We pray for our friends as the Historic Parsells Church: the pastor and first lady; the leaders; the congregation; and the neighborhood that misses their presence on the corner of Denver and Parsells.

We pray for travel mercies on this cold and snowy day for those returning home after spring break.

We pray for the students, teachers, and school administrators as they enter into the last few weeks of the school year. May they all be encouraged by our prayers and strengthened to do their best.

In all these things and in the many ways your Spirit receives each prayer, we lift to you the prayers we list on our prayer page; the prayers we named out loud; and the tender prayers we keep locked deep in our hearts.

In Jesus' awesome name we pray.

Amen.