

Old Testament: Zechariah 8: 14 - 17
New Testament: Romans 2: 1 - 5
Sermon Text: Colossians 3: 12 - 17

Please pray with me. And now Lord God may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be pleasing and acceptable in Thy sight our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Having concluded the Lenten season and remembered again Christ's victory over death, we return to our series in which we are examining characteristics that will help us live in rhythm with God and with one another. This week we move on to an examination of patience. I'll start by reminding you all that patience is something that the apostle Paul asks us not simply to put on or perform, but is something he asks us to wear; to have humility be our brand. The word Paul uses here is the word μακροθυμία. I imagine that what first comes to mind when you consider the word patience is waiting. And indeed, that is certainly one definition or way of understanding patience. Many people think of patience as a state of remaining tranquil while awaiting an outcome. Sermon over? Sorry, not quite yet. Paul has a little something different in mind and our supporting verses are going to serve to help us understand what it is that Paul has in mind when talking about patience.

Do we not testify that God has patience? I know that we like to think of God as tranquil but scripture is rife with references to God being anything but tranquil. In our passage from Zechariah God Godself says he was wrathful and did not relent. Throughout the Old Testament we see feelings like "jealous" and "anger" be associated with God. Further, if God is all powerful and all knowing can God truly be said to be awaiting an outcome? How can God be said to be waiting for something that God already knows is going to happen and that God, Godself, is going to actualize? Furthermore, the whole concept of the resurrection is God *not* awaiting an outcome. God did not wait for creation to return to its God but God intervened on behalf of the creation by providing a Savior, a Messiah, to reconcile, to return, creation back to God. No. It does not seem that God remains tranquil while awaiting an outcome. And yet, we still testify that God is patient. Let's look again at the passage from Zechariah. In verse 14 God states that the people of Judah provoked God to wrath. And God's response? In verse 15 God states that He has purposed to bring good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah and that they should not fear. God bore up under provocation. How many times did the Hebrew people provoke God by turning to false gods and idols? By worshiping other gods when it suited them? Have you forgotten the story of the golden calf in the wilderness? Have you forgotten when we went through the entire book of Judges? The history of Israel is rife with the people provoking God not just through idol worship and turning to false

gods, but treating other human beings unfairly, as less than human; their own countrymen and “foreigners”. Look again at verse 16 and 17. God wants the people to speak the truth to one another, to render judgments that are true and to make for peace. God does not want the people to devise evil in their hearts against one another and to not love false oaths. Yet, God does not abandon Israel. God continues to love Israel despite their constant provocations. “I have purposed in these days to bring good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; fear not.” This is what patience is.

Paul uses the same word, μακροθυμία, in Romans 2:4 as he is trying to help the people in the church in Rome to see their hypocrisy in judging one another. Remember, Jesus clearly said in the Sermon on the Mount judge not lest ye be judged. Paul is making the point that, in judging one another even while practicing the same behaviors, this hypocrisy is another form of provoking God. Why do you worry about the speck in your brother's eye while ignoring the giant plank sticking out of your own? Don't take advantage of God's kindness and patience, Paul says, by continuing to provoke God but recognize that God's kindness and patience is meant to lead you to repentance; to a change of heart. Step away from the behaviors that are causing harm to the community *and* cease in your unrelenting judgment of one another. God has not abandoned you, just like God never abandoned the Hebrew people and the nation of Israel. Don't take advantage of God's patience, let God's patience change you and in turn, practice the same kind of godly patience towards one another even when provoked. This is the concept of forbearance. Our Book of Order understands that people of good conscience will unintentionally, and sometimes intentionally, provoke one another in that we will disagree on things. Provocation and disagreement, however, does not preclude us from treating one another with respect and dignity. And not just us Presbyterians, but everybody. “We ... believe that there are truths and forms with respect to which men of good characters and principles may differ. And in all these we think it the duty of both private Christians and societies to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other.” (F-3.0105). Patience is bearing up under provocation.

God is love (1 John 4:16). Love is patient (1 Cor. 13:4). Sorry. If you were still hoping to get away with patience just being about remaining tranquil while awaiting an outcome as regards love, you're out of luck. In 1 Cor. 13:4 Paul uses the verbal form of the same word, μακροθυμία, to indicate that love also bears up even under provocation. Patience is, without a doubt, more about bearing up even under provocation. Bottom line: we're all going to be provoked because none of us agree on absolutely everything. Not one of us can please everyone else. And so, we practice patience with one another. We practice forbearance and bear up when provoked, most often unintentionally but even when intentionally provoked as well. It's not an

easy path to living in rhythm but it is walkable. And as Sarah and I like to say, we can do hard things. Amen.