

There was a monk who was very impatient. You may wonder, why would a monk be impatient? Don't they become monks so that they don't have to deal with the world? Yes, that's true. So imagine how impatient this monk was...

The more he tried, the more impatient he became, so he decided that he must get away altogether, to learn to be patient. So he built himself a little home deep in the woods, far away from civilization.

Years later, a man was traveling in those woods and met him. The man was amazed to find anyone living so far away from the rest of the world, so he asked the monk why he was there all by himself.

The monk said that he was there to learn to be patient.

The traveler asked how long he had been there, and the monk replied: seven (7) years.

Stunned, the traveler asked, "If there is no one around to bother you, how will you know when you are patient?"

Annoyed by the question, the monk walked away.

One could argue, I think, that many of the huge problems we face as a society and in our communities and in our families and in our churches is rooted in being impatient. Let's think about this. What do we see as huge problems facing our country? We hear a lot about being heavy in debt. Where does debt come from? Debt comes from trying to acquire things before you have the capacity to pay for them. Is that not why our country is so hugely in debt? We spent money that we didn't have? Impatient.

Our earth is groaning from our abuse of God's creation. Is this not a sign that we have sought to reap products from the earth without being patient to understand the consequences of our behavior? We always figured someone else would take care of the problem of our waste?

How about our heavy gluttony for oil from the grounds under the Middle East? Have we not been gluttonous as a country and not asked ourselves what are the consequences of having such a dependency on a product controlled by a few people?

How about problems in our families? Do not husbands and wives struggle in their relationships with one another because husbands and wives are not patient with their spouse? How about in your relationships with your kids and with your parents? Youth want to be adults before they're ready and lose patience with the advice of parents. Parents want their kids to excel early and lose patience when they fail.

How about our relationships with other people? How many times do we make decisions because we become impatient? How many times have you and I demanded results and not waited for God's time.

In our reading this morning, James demands patience. He cites as an example the farmer who plants a seed and must wait for it to rain and for the seed to grow. James says that we too must be patient and wait for the coming of the Lord. Mary in the words that Mike read shares how God is faithful from generation to generation.

Every parent here knows that you are telling your kids to be patient right now. They want Christmas to be here yesterday and you have to give them the sad news that we are still a couple of weeks away. But we are not to Christmas yet. We are in Advent. And Advent is the season of waiting.

We would all admit, I think, that we live in a culture that doesn't do waiting very well. We demand instant gratification. And as a result, our country suffers, our families suffer, the church suffers, and we suffer. We run around looking for the latest quick fixes to satisfy what we think we need in a quick fashion.

St. Frances of Avila once said this: Let nothing upset you, let nothing frighten you. Everything is changing; God alone is changeless. Patience attains the goal. One who has God lacks nothing; God alone fills every need.

You and I have the capacity to impact our culture in a positive way if we model patience in a culture that says now. So what does patience look like?

In the early 1900s, Gandhi was a lawyer from South Africa. While traveling in South Africa, he was thrown off a train for refusing to move from the first class to a third-class coach while holding a valid first-class ticket. Travelling farther on by stagecoach he was beaten by a driver for refusing to travel on the foot board to make room for a European passenger. He suffered other hardships on the journey as well, including being barred from several hotels.

These events were a turning point in his life. Gandhi vowed to work for civil rights for Indians but he sought to do this not through violence, but through non-violence. Non-violence would take patience and trust.

Gandhi came before the head of the South African government to campaign for the rights of Indians. Before General Jan Smits, Gandhi told him quietly: "I have come to fight against your government." Smits responded: "You have come here to tell me that? Is there anything more you want to say." "Yes," said Gandhi. "I am going to win."

"Well," replied Smits rather astonished. "How are you going to do that?" Gandhi then smiled at him and said, "With your help." Smits later acknowledged that Gandhi did in fact win. By courage and inward toughness and patience, Gandhi was able to stick it out and earned the general's respect and friendship and rights for the Indians.

How many issues that you are facing in life are you hearing that you need to solve now? How many voices are out there saying to you, "you need to solve this issue now." "I need your answer now." I need to know something now. How many issues are you and I facing and we are feeling anxiety that says we need to solve this now?

It may be a lot. We may be hearing lots of voices that are yelling at us to give an answer now or to give a solution now. But if we are too quick to come up with solutions and are too quick to come up with answers, this may be a sign that we are not being patient and listening to what God is saying to us and to what the world needs.

Advent is the season of waiting. When pressed for an answer, maybe our response should be, "let me think about that." When we feel anxious about a problem, maybe our response should be, "let me pray on that and get back to you on that."

To be patient is to go against our culture. But maybe it is the right time to learn to be patient and really listen to what God is saying to us. AMEN.

-Opening story found at <http://www.wowzone.com/patience.htm>

-Gandhi story from Easwaran, Eknath, *Patience: A Little Book of Inner Strength*, Blue Mountain Center for Meditation, 2010

-Given: Dec. 12, 2010 in Allison Creek Presbyterian Church (York, SC)

-Text: James 5: 7-12