# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“The Fruit of the Spirit: Patience”**

**Ephesians 4:1-2**

 **September 19, 2021**

Last Sunday we looked at a passage from Paul’s letter to the Romans in which we are told that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring to life in us the very life of God. I used an illustration in which I encouraged us to imagine that God in his triune being is like three persons in a circle holding hands: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit united by love for one another and by a common purpose which is to include you and me in the circle. It is the work of the Spirit to bring us into the circle where we are included in the life of God. The Spirit is able to do this because of the work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whose death on the cross forgives our sin and removes the wall of separation that stood between us and God and kept us out of the circle, so to speak. In the words of Jesus, we are born again into a new life with God by the Holy Spirit.

One of the characteristics of the life of God is God’s patience. If you read our daily devotional Bible passages this past week, you learned that the patience of God is revealed in his approach to sin in our lives. While he is vehemently opposed to sin because it destroys relationship with him and with others – indeed, the Bible says that his wrath is kindled again sin – he is patient with those who sin. Instead of judging us immediately when we sin, and imposing the condemnation that we deserve, God is patient with us, giving us time to confess our sin and to be forgiven. He has every right to exercise his judgment against us, but he is slow to do so – he is patient.

In his letter to Timothy, Paul uses himself as an example of God’s great patience with sinners. Calling himself the greatest of sinners, he declares the wonder of God’s patience with him. Many were the times when Paul deserved judgment and condemnation for his actions against God and the followers of Jesus, but God was patient with him, not wanting him to die in his sin. Some of us here this morning accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior at an early age and hardly remember what it was like not to be a Christian, but perhaps you accepted Christ at a later age. God was being patient with you through all those years when you were turned away from him, giving you time to be saved. Are you praying for a loved one or a friend to come to Christ? If so, take heart in the patience of God.

Since patience is a characteristic of the life of God, it needs to become a characteristic of those whose new life is in God. Patience needs to become, as the Apostle Paul says in Galatians 5:22-23, a fruit of the Spirit that he is producing in us. In your bulletin this morning you will find those Pauline verses, listing the nine fruit of the Spirit, and during the coming months we will examine each of them in turn. In your bulletin you will also find our Scripture passage from Ephesians 4:1-2 where Paul writes

Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love.

To be patient, Paul says, is to make allowance for each other’s faults, which in turn means being willing to tolerate something in another person that bothers you. It means that you consider your relationship with that person more important than any fault you find in them. That’s hard to do. People don’t tolerate much these days. Usually, when we don’t like something about someone else we find a way to let them know. Have you recently been in a line of cars waiting for the red light to turn green? Green means ‘go!’ But, of course, the person in the front of the line is not paying attention and doesn’t go. How’s your patience? Are you willing to make an allowance for their fault? Or do you use that button on your steering wheel to let them know what you think of them?

Jesus Christ, our great example of how to live the life of God, demonstrated exceptional patience. For a man as righteous and wise as he was, he was amazingly patient with his spiritually ignorant and slow to understand disciples. He made allowance for their faults because of his love for them, knowing that they needed room to grow and time to comprehend. He trusted God’s plan that he would spend three years with them, and then the Father would send another, the Holy Spirit, to be with them and to continue the work in their lives that Jesus had begun. God’s patience with those disciples was wonderfully rewarded, as the New Testament reveals, in a dedicated group of men and women who went out in the power of the Spirit and declared the Good News of Jesus Christ.

To lead a life worthy of our calling as children of God is to live like our heavenly Father, and it his Spirit living in us who is at work producing the fruit of patience. What we are asked to do is to cooperate with the Spirit, humbly allowing him to control our will and to guide our response, especially when we have been wronged. To be patient with others is to do what God does with us.