

Patience

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Online Homily ~ Sunday, March 22, 2020

Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento

Homily Part 1

This is a time that tries our patience. This is a time for deep breaths. This is a time to remember the Serenity Prayer, whether or not you know it from a 12-Step meeting, whether or not you choose the term God.

It goes: *God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things that I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.*

Certainly, these times call for courage and wisdom from all of us. Yet by now, after our grade schools and high schools, libraries, restaurants, retreat centers, vacation destinations, shopping malls, and sporting events have been rendered unavailable, it seems a prayer for *serenity* to accept what we cannot change is pretty darn relevant. I want serenity and I want it now!

In considering what I miss and miss out on right now, I realize how blessed my ordinary life has been. My impatience is a reflection of my privilege and my blessings. Perhaps these days of limitation provide an opportunity for us to examine our feelings of patience or lack of it, and to explore how we practice patience. To be sure, it's not an opportunity anybody would have chosen. But we still could make use of it. This reminds me of a recent essay I read.

Dionne Searcy is the former West Africa Bureau Chief for the *New York Times*. Searcy writes this:

On one of my last assignments in West Africa, I camped in Nigeria with herder families who shepherded their cattle for miles searching for grazing land in places being squeezed by development and dried out by a changing climate. Their lifestyles have remained essentially the same for centuries. Yet from a Western perspective, they had the most modern of relationships.

Yes, women were in charge of cooking and cleaning, but they had herds separate from their husbands, giving them financial independence. They were able to hand down an inheritance of their own to their children.

My favorite time with the herders was in the morning, when over bowls of fresh, warm milk and pots of rice slathered in melted homemade butter, the men and women would greet one another with a long list of questions.

"How was your night? How is your tiredness? How is your body? How is the dew? How is the cold? And how is your patience?"

The last question they ask because [nobody among them] ever has everything they want in life. So, they want to know, how is your patience with not having it all?"

Given her example from those herder families, I am wondering—how is your patience? What concerns have been weighing on your patience? What has challenged your patience?

The next part of our service a time of sharing. We invite you to share your Concerns and Challenges, especially those that weigh on your patience. Using the chat box on Zoom or the Comment box on Facebook, you may start writing. Reverend Lucy will read aloud some of the concerns and challenges that you name, and you can read all of them too. If you'd like to speak only with Lucy or me, feel free to send us an email or give us a call. Now Lucy will start reading.

Homily Part 2

Patience is both a feeling and a practice. The *feeling* of patience is when we are calm and serene even when things are not as we'd like them to be. The feeling is when we are peaceful and accepting of unpleasant situations. And yes, the feeling of patience is rare. Perhaps it is reliable only when we are sound asleep. *Impatience* is a much more frequent feeling.

It's not pleasant when we feel impatient. And if we lose our temper and react—if we lose our patience in an unkind way—it's even worse. It's regrettable. When others lose their temper with us, it hurts.

The practice of patience has to do with how we deal with unpleasant situations and things we can't control or can't get through as quickly as we'd like to. The practice of patience involves *exploring* how we are feeling. Just observing it. Not rushing to judgment about how impatient or agitated or bored we feel, just accepting it as a real feeling.

The practice of showing patience to another may not *feel* much like patience on the inside. The practice of showing patience to ourselves may not feel like a familiar way of treating ourselves. Yet it is the starting point on the right path toward accepting things we cannot change in the short run. It is the place that allows us to observe how we are feeling. We can accept the feeling without acting on it in ways we might regret.

Maybe another way to think about the practice of patience is to call it kindness. No matter how we feel in any given situation, the practice of kindness could be our goal. And we can start by showing kindness to ourselves

Perhaps the most common kind of impatience we have is impatience with ourselves. Not only feeling impatient with how we're not managing the current chaos we find ourselves in, but also judging ourselves negatively for it. That's what I've heard and read about in recent days—lots of impatience with ourselves, and judgment of ourselves. Things like: *I'm not doing this very well. I'm not feeling like a suitable parent or partner or a good caregiver to those who depend on me, or a good student or loyal employee.*

Maybe you've said that about yourself recently. Guess what! You don't have enough information to make that judgment. None of us does. We've never been through this before. There is no legitimate, approved measure or standard by which to measure whether we are doing it right.

The only things we know to be right are—wash your hands, avoid groups, stay home, and don't buy too much toilet paper. And, of course, be kind. Starting with yourself. And then sharing that kindness with others.

Together we are living in surreal, strange and stressful times. These times are not usual or normal or easy. Rev. Susan Frederick Gray is the president of the Unitarian Universalist Association. In a recent pastoral message, Susan said: There is no script for this. No clear map to follow. So take care of yourselves, she said.

Though we can't see one another tonight, let us find comfort in knowing that in these trying times, we are all going to be doing the best we can. And the best we can start with kindness.

In the coming days, I invite you to ask yourself: how is your patience? How is it feeling? And then, honor that feeling. And then, remember that, no matter the feeling, the practice is the same: kindness. So may it be.