

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, Luke 13:6-9

Sermon Title: "Love is Patient"

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This past Wednesday, as I was preparing to make my way over to St. Philip's for our shared, Ash Wednesday service, I heard the news – active shooter in Florida High School. I stopped and watched some of the news clips in horror as students were evacuated with their hands up to show they were not the shooter who was at the time was still at-large, and my prayer, my question, and my lament was "when will it end, Lord?". When will it end?

And so, with this news which reminded us so tragically of our mortality and the frailty of this life, I headed over to St. Philip's to celebrate Ash Wednesday – a day in the life of the church when we reflect on our mortality and the frailty of this life. Rev. Marcia and I, as we were gathering our thoughts, setting the space, getting ready for this time of worship, we too took a moment to reflect on the horrors of the day – sharing a prayer, a question, and a lament – when will it end Lord? When will it end?

The moments following such tragedy have a way of stopping us in our tracks. They have a way of making us want to crawl into bed and escape the world. They can suck all hope from us and can leave us in a place of utter despair. And as we were preparing for service on Wednesday, I felt so heavy with sorrow and hopelessness. I almost felt like taking a stand like the owner of the vineyard in the parable that Jesus spoke and that has been shared with us today. The vineyard owner saw a tree that lacked fruit, a tree that looked hopeless, and he was ready to chop it down. That's how I felt on Wednesday after hearing the news from Florida, ready to just forsake this world. For what good can come? What good fruit can grow in our world for right then, in those moments of shock and sadness, it felt like a barren world. It felt like darkness won.

And then, while standing in the St. Philip's Parish Hall, trying to force myself to focus and prepare for the service, a gardener appeared. For just like in our scripture today, where the gardener told the owner not to forsake the tree but to let him nurture it, to

care for it, to tend it, to help it grow, such a man arrived at that moment in the Parish Hall. A man I had never seen before came in, said good evening and that he would like to make a donation to the Food Pantry. And he extended towards me a handful of one dollar bills, the kind that you can tell have been through a lot in their lifetime for they were wrinkled, worn, maybe even torn, but he had smoothed them out as best they could, stacked neatly - ten of them total - and gave them to the work of feeding people - the work of caring for people.

I compare this man to the gardener, for he came in that moment to offer a token of nurture into the world that I was ready to forsake. He came to show care for the world, in some way. A caring that did not diminish the pain of 17 young lives lost, 17 futures unfulfilled, but a caring that pointed me away from forsaking the world and pointing me back to helping the world overcome such senseless violence. He came to tend to the world that is hurting and to help it, in some small way, still bear good fruit. For the world can indeed bear good fruit, when tended by patient gardeners.

When tragedy strikes and I wonder about the future of our world, one scripture seems to always call to me in those moments - the very first words of John 3:16 - for God so loved the world. For God so loved the creation which was crafted. For God so loved the people, formed in God's very image. For God so loved the world, and because of this, I believe we are called to love the world too, even when it is hard. And as 1 Corinthians 13 and the parable of the barren fig tree remind us today, love is patient. To love the world around us, especially in the difficult moments of history, is not always easy to do when we just want the good fruit now. But this is where patience comes in.

Now, please don't get me wrong, I don't talk about patience as a passive action when it comes to how we love the world around us. Patience is not, as we see from the gardener today, an idle task. Patience is seeing the reality of the moment no matter how grim, seeing the possibilities of the future, and doing the work to move us toward that place. For in our parable today, the gardener saw the fruitless tree, he could envision a tree with an abundant harvest, and he knew the work that needed to be done to get there. A

work that would not overnight fix the tree. But a work, that in a year, in a lifetime, may just produce the fruit they longed for.

When we consider patience as an aspect of love, whether we are talking about the love of our world, or about the love of our community, our faith community, or about the love of friends, family, beloved ones in our lives, the gardener's message remains true. For whenever we are dissatisfied, saddened, feel hopeless when it comes to the things or the people we love, we need to first see the realities of where we are, envision the possibilities that could be, and then start the work to see if we can't get there. To see if we can get to those fruitful places. We will not get there in a moment, but we can begin to nurture growth toward that place right now.

As we enter this season of Lent, may we take a moment to think about the loves in our lives, the world, the community, and the beloved people on this journey with us where we need some patience. Where we need to nurture, tend, care for, and grow the loves in our lives into more fruitful creations. Where we can see a bright future, but must find our way through the darkness to get there. Right now as I stand here today, I am still torn by the realities of Wednesday, and yet I know the world can be better than that – we can be better than that. And so I ask the questions: What will we do to nurture it? What will we do to move the world from the darkness that we often feel in times like these and move it in a bright direction? For God so loved the world, and so should we.

And as we do this, as we reflect, as we think about the loves in our lives where we have a need in this moment for active patience, may we find comfort and strength in the love of God, revealed to us in the nurturing, tending, caring, growing gift of Jesus Christ – a love that is eternally patient with us as we, at times, fumble our way through life. A love that sees us and the world just as we are, a love that sees the possibilities of what we can be, and a love that is forever there to nurture us and move us and the world onward to even more fruitful living. So be it and may it be so. Amen.