

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

John 12:20-24

When we think about it, a good description of people today would be "The Impatient Generation". We are living in a time when everything has to happen now, and if it doesn't happen when we think it should happen, we become impatient, we complain, we stress out.

How patient are we with God? That might seem like a strange question but it really isn't all that weird. Maybe someone has prayed and wanted God to fix something *rightnow*. We want healing, we want a change in our circumstances, we want a sign that will show us what direction we should take, we want our loved ones to be more understanding and helpful, and we want it *right now*. And when the answer doesn't come as quickly as we would like, we become angry that God doesn't seem to be listening or even care.

Here are some of the things that people have said about their lack of faith in God and the reason they have no interest in attending church services: "I haven't been to church for 20 years because when my wife was sick I needed God to keep his promise and answer my prayer. But he didn't". Or, "I used to go to church, but there was a falling out between a member of the church and myself. I prayed that God would help us both to get over it, but nothing happened. I can't bring myself to go back again". A heart wrenching statement was this one: "My son was riding his bike home from school and was hit by a drunk driver. I believed that stuff about God being a shepherd

whose rod and staff protect us, but where was he when my little boy died".

An instant, fix-it God is the kind of God we understand. He has the power and he uses it to make things right. It's easy to worship a God who

gives miraculous cures, who provides a job when we suddenly find ourselves unemployed, who gives peace, serenity and direction after confusion and depression. An experience of God in these circumstances just makes us want to sing and shout and praise him for his love for us.

But as we are singing loudly and excitedly about God's goodness, there are those listening to us who have no idea what we're talking about. They can't relate to our excitement in any way. Maybe they are in the middle of the pain that goes with the break up of their home when a spouse walks out. Maybe they have been diagnosed with terminal cancer. Maybe they have a sick child, and they have prayed and prayed that God would provide a cure, but it seems their prayers go no further than the ceiling. Maybe they are simply feeling distant from God, spiritually low, misunderstood and unappreciated. How much more difficult is it to trust in and worship God when He doesn't provide the quick fix that we are looking for.

In our Gospel reading for today, some Greeks wanted to see Jesus! Perhaps they have heard of the many signs and wonders that Jesus had done, such as raising Lazarus from the dead, healing lepers, restoring sight to the blind, giving strength to the lame, raising the dead; no wonder people came to see him.

Wouldn't we want to see this amazing man for ourselves?

Yes, Jesus did heal instantly and gave people new purpose, right away calmed fears, forgave sins and brought people closer to God. But Jesus also struggled. He carried enormous burdens,

especially when He saw the disbelief, the hardness of human hearts, the blindness of even those who were closest to Him.

They couldn't understand what He was on about, and refused to hear what God's plan was for him. He felt alone, deserted by friends and his Father. He struggled in prayer over where life's journey was taking Him. He had to walk a path that He would've given anything to avoid if He had His own way. Of course He needed to do all that for our salvation. But I think He also wanted to show us what it's like to walk with God. It's not all about instant fixes.

There are moments when God shows Himself in dramatic ways, that we are impressed by and happy to talk about and proclaim God's goodness. But walking with God can also mean struggles, pain, uncertainty, confusion, bewilderment. There are times when we have to pray like Jesus, *"Father, not what I want, but what you want! Father, into your hands I commend my spirit!"* When Jesus talks about his glory that is about to be revealed, He isn't talking about some earth-shattering, soul-shaking experience of His godliness. Glory for Him meant dying on the cross with all of its cruelty and shame. Jesus says to the Greeks who came to see Him, that to really know God, is not only to see Him in those exalted moments, but also to see Him in the dark valleys.

In our lives there are going to be those times when the awesomeness of God is clear, and we will feel really close to Him. He answers our prayers quickly and clearly. But there are also the tough times when God doesn't seem to be interested in what we are going through and what we are feeling. We feel like a seed that is dead and buried under a mound of dirt. We long for a quick fix, an instant solution. We of the 'Impatient Generation' want God to do something *now*! But it doesn't happen.

However, just because God doesn't jump to our demands, doesn't mean he has abandoned us. It means that in those times, God is putting extra time into His relationship with us. He is drawing us closer to Himself. He is building up our trust in Him and our love for Him. He is strengthening us for service in ways that would otherwise have been difficult, or impossible, without first experiencing the dark valleys.

There are those of us have been really excited about God, because we have experienced His amazing love and power. But remember, also, that this same God is still with us in the days when we don't feel his presence so clearly.

It is very likely that there are some listening here today who are struggling with questions like what God's plan is for them in the future. Keep in mind that although the seed of grain dies in the ground, it is followed by new growth, new life and abundance, and that is a promise of the One who always keeps His promises, Jesus Christ the Lord.

AMEN.