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Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
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He Delays, But He Comes

Part of June series from Mark: Contrasts of the Kingdom

Mark 5:21–43

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It involved a bunch of 4-6 years old, a marshmallow, and patience. They called it “the Marshmallow Test.” In 1970, Stanford University conducted a social exercise with children ages 4-6. Each child was offered a marshmallow and a promise. They were offered one marshmallow that was theirs to eat, but if they waited 15 minutes without eating it, they would be given a second marshmallow. It was a test of patience measured in marshmallows.

The results showed that only about 1/3 of the children were able to wait the 15 minutes and get the second marshmallow. But this is not so surprising. Even more so today, now that we have moved into the age of the touch screen smart phone. Who wants to wait for something better when we can be instantly gratified now. We are used to getting things now. With just a swipe of the finger, our smart phones give us what we want. Plane tickets purchased, a book ordered, two-day shipping, to your door, no installation required. Would you wait 15 minutes for a 2nd marshmallow?

In our sermon today, we will explore the concept of Christian patience. Whether we are talking about a 12 year old chronic illness, or a 12 year old girl who dies – it appears outwardly that God’s kingdom is late in arriving. Yet in both cases, Jesus does come and he comes with great might and mercy. We continue our series in Mark: Contrasts of the Kingdom, by considering the perfect timing of Jesus, our King. He delays, but He comes.

1. When facing affliction

Twelve years is a long time to wait for a cure. It was an even longer time to live as an outcast. Her bleeding made her ceremonially unclean, which meant she could not have contact with any other Israelite or with Temple worship for all that time. Anyone who touches her would also be declared unclean. So she waited. For twelve years, she sought a cure; she exhausted her savings on this doctor and that treatment; and having spent all she had, she was no better off. In fact, she had only gotten worse. For twelve years she waited, until she learned of him.

They say he has healed many diseases. They say he has power to cast out demons. It is even said that he made a paralytic to walk with just a word. He preaches and teaches with the authority of a prophet. He speaks good news and talks of God's kingdom as a gracious visitation; a saving of the lowly and sinful. He could be the one for whom we've been waiting. He could be the Christ of Israel.

And her faith endures, searches, reaches out to find him. But when the crowd is so large. How will she get his attention? She notices he is walking with the ruler of the synagogue. What will he say if Jesus is found with a woman who is unclean? So she decides to come in secretly. Perhaps if she can just touch him, or even his robe his power will make her well. And her faith endures, searches, and reaches out to touch the hem of his garment. And behold, immediately she is made well.

It took twelve years, but she found him. Or he found her. In fact, he found her the minute his kingdom drew her heart to trust in him. That is the nature of God's kingdom; its rule is not to give us whatever we want when we want it; its rule is not in terms of doctors or medicine or cures or earthly outcomes; but its rule is something that happens in your heart. Its fruits are patience, endurance, searching, reaching, trusting.

And so it is for you. The same test is before you. Maybe its a chronic affliction like back pain or arthritis; maybe its a debilitating disease like, diabetes or dementia. Maybe its something you've spent a lot of money on, something that you've seen doctor after doctor about and not been able to find a consistent diagnosis or cure. Perhaps its a spiritual affliction like impatience with people or anger in relationships; or its some other sort of desire for gratification: a gratification by gossiping or by searching for sensual pleasure in those things which are unclean and unholy.

It is laid before you too: to gratify or to satisfy. The test is before you: to take the marshmallow and gratify your flesh today; or to wait for the Savior who will satisfy your whole self eternally. You could take the marshmallow. You could gratify your flesh for a time. You could respond by angrily arguing, by constantly complaining, by doubtfully despairing. And that is what we do. We reach out for the touch screen solution, a swipe of the finger which will make it all go away, a connection that will get us what we want now. And these sins of impatience and instant gratification are chronic disabilities that will always infect our flesh.

But there are times when God wants us to wait. There are those many, many times, when God delays. When he delays twelve years even. But his kingdom does not come in instant gratifications, but eternal satisfactions. Even though physically,

temporally, Jesus might seem to delay coming or answering your prayers, we know that he has come to us already. For he has taught us to endure, to search, to reach out for him.

And there he is, when we need him the most; enduring our pains, being separated and outcast for our sins, being afflicted by our curse – there he wants us to find him; in his everlasting patience; on the cross. For that is where our faith is reaching. That is where we find the answer which does not gratify, but which satisfies. There God's anger against our sins is satisfied; there our salvation is satisfied. There we find what we are looking for.

As the writer to the Hebrews says,

Hebrews 12:1–3 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

So we keep on praying, enduring, searching, waiting. And in the midst of a crowd, He stops. He wants the crowd to notice her. He wants them to hear what he has to say. He leaves the great ruler of the synagogue whose daughter is dying, he leaves her waiting, and stops for this bleeding woman; he stops to talk to this untouchable. And he says, "Go in peace."

For although He delays, His will is good and He always hears our prayers and he sends us away in peace. The only reason this peace can be yours is because Jesus has reconciled the world to God. And He will respond with goodness, whatever the outcome. He will notice you, no matter how small or insignificant or unclean. And will give your faith strength. For as we read earlier from Lamentations: "For the Lord is good to those who wait for Him; to the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord." God's will is good; and it is His will to forgive your sins, to strengthen your faith, to save you. For if he was willing to give up his own Son for you, will he not give you all good things. So that even though Jesus delays, you know he always will help you, and you know that even though he delays, he will come.

2. When facing death

But what about those situations where it seems he comes too late? He has so much going on after all. A whole world of broken, hurting sinners, all in need of his care, all in need of his help; perhaps he just cannot make it to you in time, or in full measure. What about those situations where Jesus delays so long that it ends in the loss of something you cannot get back; an illness which finds no cure; a situation which ends in death. Has Jesus let you down?

The original marshmallow test measured patience in terms of self-control. However, later tests have shown that there were other factors to consider in the children's choices. In 2012, the University of Rochester did a similar control test, only this time they hypothesized another factor which they called "strategic waiting."

Strategic waiting was a measure of a child's confidence in the promise. In the first group, they began by first breaking a promise to them before proceeding with the test. They called this group the unreliable group. In Group 2, they fulfilled the promise, then offered the marshmallow deal. The results showed the second group, the reliable group, to be willing to wait up to four times longer than the unreliable group. So, they argued, patience was to be understood as more than just self-control; but also in terms of strategic waiting. How reliable is that promise?

So Jairus must have struggled. On his way, Jesus is stopped by the bleeding woman and as He delays, Jairus' daughter dies. Why has Jesus taken so long? Why would he stop and help this unclean woman, and not come sooner to help my 12 year old daughter? Well, maybe He just has too much going on. A whole world of broken, hurting sinners, all in need of his care, all in need of his help; perhaps he just cannot make it to you in time, or in full measure. And so life ends with the loss of something you cannot get back; an illness which finds no cure; a situation which ends all hope.

The strategic wait is measured. And that is what the Christian struggle is all about. Strategic waiting. A struggle against the doubts of our flesh; a struggle against the lies of the devil; a struggle against a weeping yet mocking world. Our flesh doubts that God will ever make good on his promises. The devil tells us he is too late and too weak. And the world begins by weeping because God is no where to be found and then when He shows up in a promise, the world mocks him. Will we join in?

But Jesus casts out those lies. He casts out our flesh, the devil, the weeping, mocking world, and he brings in only those who believe. He brings us into that room, where that little girl lies dead that we may see his promise. He says, "Talitha, cumi," and all hope and patience and faith arises to life. For His promise is sure. And his word

is all powerful And his kingdom, though delayed, does come. It comes with such power that to Him, death is merely a sleep, and with a whisper, He startles the dead to life.

God never breaks his promises. That is why the marshmallow test cannot be purely a measure of our self-control, for then we will always fail. Our flesh will always mourn, mistrust, and mock. But if this is about strategic waiting, then we have something to hope for.

And so he says, "Wait." He tells the parents not to let this be known. And he does this because he has not yet risen himself. He says because brining this girl back to earthly life is not the goal of his ministry. His goal is not to be crowned Lord of this life, but Lord of life eternal. And that is why he delays. He must finish his work. He must die that girls death, for her sins, and he must die our death, so that his resurrection becomes strategic waiting.

Jesus never comes too late. He always comes at just the right time. And that is what he will do for Louise. Our sister member, Louise has been in the hospital for two days now. Her blood pressure was so low that her heart could sustain enough oxygen to the organs and she slipped into a coma. And now all we can do is pray and wait for Jesus. We don't know if his next step will be to raise her body up out of that bed to restored health or if to raise her body up out of the grave to eternal health. But we do know he will come. And he will come at just the right time.

This is a promise of more than two marshmallows; a promise that cannot be broken; a promise of His return. And that is what Christian patience is all about. It is about his delay. It is confidence that, as the psalmist says, "weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning." And when that morning sun rises, God will bring all joy to fulfillment. So eternally full, that no treat, no fleshly gratification, could ever compare. Even when he delays, even when you lose someone you love, even when death itself visits you, you know that he will come, and when he does he will raise up the bodies of all, and give to all who believe eternal life in Him. For "Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many, to those who eagerly wait, for him he will appear as second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (Hebrews 9:28).

God has more in store for you than just marshmallows. His kingdom is about more than a sugary fix, more than instant gratification, more than a touch and swipe and get it now answer. Because we know that even after that one marshmallow, we will soon want another. And another. And another. And when we've filled, up we'll have a stomach ache. What we need is not what gratifies our desire now, but what satisfies

God's will for eternity. And that is Jesus. Your strategic waiting. For in every affliction, he might delay, but he does come. And even in death, he might delay, but he will surely come on the clouds of heaven and every eye will see, and every knee will bow, and we will call him Lord of all; the King has come. It is a test of patience measured in Christ. Amen.