

TWO VIRTUES THIS PANDEMIC HAS HOPEFULLY TAUGHT US

My next-door neighbour, besides being a Montreal Canadiens fan, is also an avid fisherman. He has a boat that he takes out fishing quite often. I ran into him last Thursday and asked if he would be fishing this weekend. He told me that he had put an offer on a new boat and was hoping to hear back this weekend if the seller would accept. As a result, he was planning to wait around this weekend in anticipation of getting the call.

I was in the backyard cleaning our pool on Saturday afternoon and noticed my neighbour's vehicle was gone. I wondered if he had gotten the call to pick up the new boat. He pulled into his driveway while I was still in the pool, so I yelled over to him and asked if he had been out to pick up his new boat. He looked over at me and said, "No, they are being so slow in getting back to me. If this pandemic hasn't taught me patience, I don't think anything will!"

Perhaps you had the gift of patience prior to this pandemic, but if not, I think there is truth in my neighbour's comment that this ordeal has hopefully taught us this trait. We have had to display patience in so many ways during this time. For instance:

- Being patient standing in lines first while waiting to get into a store and then when paying for our items once inside.
- Being patient during each lockdown and stay-at-home order as we awaited the lifting of restrictions.
- Being patient as we waited for vaccines to be developed and then for our turn to be eligible to receive our shot.
- Being patient right now as we wait to enter Step 3 of the reopening plan and move forward into what we consider to be normal living.

I think there have been times when we have all lost our patience during this pandemic, but hopefully it has taught us this virtue. It often takes tests and trials in our lives to develop an attribute such as patience. I learned this virtue during a trial I went through back in 2007-2009. During that two-year period I was unable to work due to many health issues I developed from pancreatitis. Having to wait during that period of time for my body to heal to the point that I could return to work helped me to develop patience. It is a quality that has helped me so much since that point of time. I think we will all be blessed in a better way if this pandemic has taught us patience.

I hope this pandemic may have helped people to develop another virtue besides patience. The virtue I hope this pandemic has also taught people is gratitude. The reason why I say this is because this was the other virtue that came out of my two-year health ordeal. I took a lot for granted prior to my illness including my ability to work and do ministry. The day before my health crisis I not only led

two worship services, but as the moderator of the Presbytery of Lambton-West Middlesex at that time, I also inducted a new minister into their pastoral charge at Forest. It was a busy Sunday indeed.

That next day was when my health deteriorated. I not only lost my health, but my ability to work. After one year of being ill, I also had to resign from my position as the minister of my pastoral charge. I had so much taken away from me during that time. Despite my losses, I was not bitter because God developed the virtue of gratitude in me along with patience. I said to myself during that time, if my health ever returned to the point that I could do ministry again I would never take it for granted. God blessed me with the opportunity to return to ministry in September of 2009. Twelve years later I am still grateful for each and every Sunday that I am able to lead worship and do not take this gift for granted.

Just like I experienced with my health crisis, we have all had things taken away from us as a result of this pandemic. I hope that one of the things that we have learned coming out of this pandemic besides patience is to be more appreciative and grateful for the things that we may have taken for granted before. In fact, it is God's will for us to have this kind of gratitude in our daily lives. We discover this desire God has for us in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18:

Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

Notice how Paul expressed we should be thankful in all circumstances as opposed to for all circumstances. Using this pandemic as an example, Paul would not expect us to be thankful that we have experienced this ordeal. What he would say is that we can still be thankful in the midst of this because God has been with us and has been helping us to endure. When trials like this pandemic happen, it goes against our natural inclination to be thankful and grateful because we tend to focus on the things that have been taken away from us. As we see here, it is God's will for us to change our attitude in these situations by becoming more grateful, thankful, joyful, and prayerful. By doing these things that God wills for us, we will find it easier to be more joyful and thankful no matter what situation we are going through.

Gratitude, thankfulness and patience are attributes that I developed during my health ordeal. Having developed these attributes back then has helped me greatly to persevere through this pandemic. I pray that this pandemic has blessed every one of us with these attributes as well. We will all appreciate the gift of life so much more moving forward by following God's will and letting Him bless us with these attributes.

God Bless and Keep Safe

Pastor Dean