

**Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL**  
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**Worship Series: Tell Us a Story**  
**Service Theme: A Story of Reckless Patience**  
**Sermon Theme: Reckless Patience (August 6, 2023)**  
**Matthew 21:33-43**

“Patience is a virtue,” so the saying goes. And I think most people agree with that. We greatly appreciate a parent, teacher, or spouse who’s shown noteworthy patience to us. And we especially appreciate patient people when we encounter people who exhibit none. Like the restaurant patron who goes unhinged when the waiter gets their order wrong; or the road-rage motorist who rides your bumper, angrily screaming and gesturing at you for only going 10 over the speed limit.

Patience is a good thing. But the question we need to wrestle with this morning is, “Is patience ALWAYS a good thing?” “Is it possible to be too patient?” We can probably all think of examples. A tree in our backyard was recently struck by lightning. Would it be wise for us to “just be patient” with the tree, hoping its structural integrity will hold, while running the risk that it’ll crash down on our house? If someone has been abusing a spouse or their child, would it be wise to “just be patient” with them, hoping they’ll stop?

You might call those examples of **Reckless Patience**. Reckless because such patience ignores the danger, harm, or negative impact that being patient in those situations will almost inevitably produce. So, there are some situations where it seems possible to be too patient—if such patience is reckless. Which is interesting, because in Jesus’ story this morning, he pictures God acting with what some might call “reckless patience.”

Just like last week, Jesus told this parable in the Temple Courts on Tuesday of Holy Week when he was confronted by some of the Jewish religious leaders who demanded to know who’d given Jesus his authority to carry out his ministry. In response, Jesus tells three parables, directed at these Chief Priests and Elders who wanted him

dead. The parable of the Two Sons we heard last Sunday, the parable of the Tenants we hear today, and the parable of the Wedding Banquet we’ll hear next Sunday.

Jesus says, ***“Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.”***

For Jesus’ audience, this would have been a familiar scene. In Israel, there were large estates owned by wealthy people who lived elsewhere. These foreigners would rent out their land to tenant farmers, who then ran the farm or vineyard for them. The tenants got to keep a portion of the produce and profit as payment for their work. However, because the land still belonged to the owner, the tenant farmers had a contractual obligation to give to the owner a portion of the produce and profits raised through his land. Kind of like renting out your home to tenants and collecting rent from them.

But in Jesus’ parable, when the landowner’s servants arrived to collect what was due to their master, ***“the tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third.”*** If you were that landowner, what would you do? Shockingly, the landowner shows patience. Maybe he calls it a misunderstanding, or an unfortunate accident. But he patiently gives the tenants another chance. This time, he sends at least four servants, but once again, ***“the tenants treated them the same way.”***

After that, I’d probably send in the SWAT team to wipe out these evil tenants! But once again, the landowner exhibits unbelievable patience. He gives them another chance. He sends his own son assuming, ***“They will respect my son.”*** But are we surprised to hear the way these ruthless, heartless tenants treated the landowner’s son? ***“When the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.”***

That sounds like a criminally idiotic move for these tenants. However, there were laws in Jesus' time that stated if a property owner died, and had no heir, the current occupants of the estate would become the rightful owners. So when these wicked tenants saw the landowner's son coming, they assumed the landowner was dead thinking, "If we get rid of the son, the vineyard will be all ours!" Which sounds like a reasonable, albeit extremely evil plan. Except for one problem—the owner wasn't dead. So Jesus asks his enemies a question with an obvious answer. ***"When the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"*** Even Jesus' enemies, who must have known Jesus was telling this story against them, agreed that the only proper recourse was destruction and judgment! ***"He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."***

These religious leaders were no dummies. They understood Jesus' point in this story. But to make sure we understand it, let's run down the cast of characters. The vineyard owner is God. The vineyard is God's kingdom. The tenant farmers were the Jews—especially their religious leaders. The servants who were mistreated and killed were the prophets God sent to his people—men like Elijah, Isaiah, and John the Baptist—who were rejected, persecuted, ignored, and even martyred for proclaiming God's message. And the son of the landowner who was killed and thrown out of the vineyard is the one telling the story—Jesus himself.

Obviously, one of Jesus' intentions from this story is to highlight God's incomparable patience! That certainly meshes well with the real-life Bible accounts that exhibit God's patience. Consider how God patiently calls to Adam and Eve after their fall into sin, ***"Where are you? What have you done?"*** patiently giving them the chance to confess and repent over their sin, even though he already knew where they were and what they'd done. Or how God patiently gave the wicked people of Noah's day over a century of unmistakable warning about the coming flood as Noah built a huge boat out in the desert. Or how God kept patiently providing for his whining, rebellious people during their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, ushering them

into the Promised Land, rather than wiping them out completely. Or how God patiently allowed Saul, the persecutor of God's people to continue living and pursuing Christians until the right time when Christ called him to repentance, brought him to faith, and turned him into one of the greatest missionaries!

Throughout the pages of Scripture, we meet a God who is equally as unfathomably patient with undeserving people as the landowner in Jesus' parable. As the Apostle Peter, who knew a thing or two about God's patience, wrote, ***"The Lord is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."***

But is God too patient? I mean, as atrocious as it is that the wicked tenants kill the landowner's son in the parable, shouldn't he have seen it coming? These wicked men had shown nothing but rejection and barbarism on the landowner's previous attempts. Did he really think sending his son would turn out any differently? These tenants deserved punishment, not patience, right? Because of his reckless patience, ignoring the risks, pain and harm resulted.

Can't the same be said about God? Jesus' Jewish audience for this parable wouldn't have missed the allusion he was making to Isaiah 5, our first reading—The Song of the Vineyard. There, God is compared to a vineyard owner who worked incredibly hard to build and plant the perfect vineyard. But despite all he'd done, his vineyard produced nothing but bad fruit. From the lips of the vineyard owner, God speaks to the Israelites, ***"What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?"***

What more could the God of patient grace have done for them? Yet they still rejected and ignored him, failing to produce the good fruit of faith he desired. Shouldn't God have crushed them like worthless bugs? Shouldn't his patience have run out centuries earlier? Didn't God's patience allow wicked people to flourish, and faithful people to be harmed?

Maybe you've had similar feelings about God's reckless patience. Wondering why he hasn't sent his fiery wrath on this wicked world yet. Yearning for him to crush everyone who's caused you pain. Doesn't God's patience allow wicked people to flourish, and faithful people to be harmed?

Seems kind of reckless, doesn't it? Ignoring the risks, harm or danger that such patience will inevitably produce. Exactly! That's why we find God's Son, proclaiming this story of reckless patience as a warning and call to repentance for the very enemies who would murder him three days later.

God's patience for undeserving sinners so outweighed his concern for any harm or danger that might befall him that he was willing to give up everything—including his Son—for one, all-important purpose: that his enemies could be his children. The vineyard owner in the parable was patient because he thought the tenants would respect and honor his son. But God exhibited his reckless patience, sending his Son while knowing full-well what would happen—what had to happen—when Jesus came. Why did God exhibit such reckless patience? And why did his Son willingly go along with it? Simple. Because God ***“wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”*** So he's patient with them! Giving them the time of grace they need to be called to repentance, and trust in him for forgiveness!

Reckless patience is good when it's motivated by a loving, personally-sacrificial concern for the good of others! It's hard to value such patience when it's shown to those who have hurt us, or who we feel don't deserve it. But when we're the ones who have received such patience? Then it's invaluable! Friends, that's exactly the kind of patience God has also shown to you and me!

The vineyard owner did all the hard work of planting and preparing the vineyard, then allowed the tenants to use it and blessed them through it. Likewise, in our lives hasn't God placed us into circumstances that are choked full of blessings? And yet, how do we respond? Do we give God what we owe him? Like the wicked tenants, we often strive

to keep it all for ourselves; to give the glory due only to God to ourselves; to ignore or abuse the message and messengers he's sent to correct or encourage us; even trying to push God's Son out of the vineyard of our lives, so we can be the owners.

And yet, in his gracious, reckless patience, the Father sent his Son to certain death. The Son willingly came to certain death, to save sinners like those enemies who would kill him; to save impatient, disobedient sinners like us, for whom God's patience should have run out long ago!

But let no one mistake God's patience for weakness or apathy. If we continue to reject, abuse, or misuse God's patience as a license, then remember that the God of perfect patience is also the God of perfect justice! Jesus' other intention of telling this parable is to warn all who remain unmoved or unmotivated by God's patient grace!

The tenants in the parable, and many of the Jewish religious leaders failed to respond to God's patience. So, how can we? If we understand the unfathomable patience that God has shown for undeserving sinners like us, won't we also seek to show loving patience toward others? Certainly, sometimes patience can be more harmful—when not speaking up or acting hurts the person, or others are hurt through their actions. It's difficult because God has perfect knowledge of just how much patience is needed while we obviously don't! But can we more often err on the side of patience-- giving people a loving chance instead of assuming the worst or giving up on people when they haven't been everything we want them to be? Can we strive to be more patient with ourselves when we struggle, or fail to be everything we want to be? Can we be more patient with God, when he doesn't give us everything we want exactly when we want?

Friends, patience is a virtue. Especially when it's God's reckless patience! His patience is always for our good, and he's never too patient for us or the world. That's the kind of patience God has shown to you! Let's reflect it in the patience we now exhibit for others in our lives!