
Reflections on Patience

**An article for the *Cathedral Times*
by the Very Rev. Sam Candler, *Dean of the Cathedral*
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I don't always play guitar, but when I do, I play a Joni Mitchell song! Playing guitar, which I do poorly, makes me slow down. In the past couple of months, I played "The Circle Game" a lot. Perhaps you remember its chorus, "the seasons, they go round and round, and the painted ponies go up and down." Maybe you remember its verses, describing the wonder of a boy growing from young, to 10, to 16, and, finally, to 20 years old.

In the 16-year-old verse, "they tell him, 'Take your time, it won't be long now, 'til you drag your feet to slow the circles down.'" The last verse is, "So the years spin by and now the boy is 20 / Though his dreams have lost some grandeur coming true / There'll be new dreams, maybe better dreams and plenty / Before the last revolving year is through."

For the past forty years, as I have sung this song, I have been disappointed that the song stops when the boy is but 20 years old, as if that is the end of the road! Of course, Joni Mitchell, a real poetic genius, was only about 23 years old when she wrote this amazingly wise song; the song's ages stopped at 20 years old. Yet, she knew that "it won't be long now, 'til you drag your feet to slow the circles down."

I have been considering patience lately, and the lack of it around our world. It used to be that impatience was a sure sign of youth and immaturity. Well, it sure was with me. I was always impatient in my young days, eager to get here, go there, accomplish this, achieve that. Joni Mitchell was writing to me when she said, "Take your time, it won't be long now."

But impatience seems to be a feature of our present culture, no matter what our age. Many of us are still eager to catch up on the time we lost during the pandemic. We want to have everything back, and in a hurry. We want the latest iPhone. We binge watch the latest television shows. We snarl at the traffic that has returned. We gripe at the slow pace of good politics.

"Patience you must have, my young Padawan. Have patience and all will be revealed," said Yoda. (But Yoda had to live almost 900 years before he could say that!)

I think that patience is the way we are supposed to endure change, to endure especially the unchosen changes that happen to us, the changes that are forced upon us. The word "suffer" itself, means, in some way, to endure change, to go through change. The wise people among us use the word, "patience," to describe how to live through such unchosen changes, such suffering. Indeed, sometimes the Bible uses the word, "longsuffering" instead of "patience."

Yes, I know that there are always people clamoring for change. Most of us want change. But we usually want only the change that we choose! We are usually not willing, for instance, to change ourselves. We would rather change someone else!

"Live by the Spirit," said Saint Paul, "and do not gratify the desires of the flesh" And one of the fruits of the Spirit, he said, is patience. Patience is a sign that we are living in the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-23).

How, then, might we cultivate patience in a frantic age? My first advice is always to "stop the urgency." Most things are not really so urgent as we make them out to be. When I am stuck and stifled and snarled, one of my practices is to stop trying to move! When I let go of the urgent, I often appreciate something else that is present right there. There might be great love there, great joy (two other fruits of the Spirit).

Or, I go sit somewhere. And I practice, again and again, practice stopping the urgency. Church buildings are good places for that. Chapels and naves. Quiet places where there is no urgency. Where prayer has been valid before, and where prayer will be valid again. Slow the circles down. Patience.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in black ink and has a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
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