

**“Shaken, Not Stirred”, Rev. Shelley Kral**  
**Romans 12:12**  
**Worship Service April 19, 2020**

Good morning –

Begin with a question: How are you doing? Not how are your finances doing, or your health doing – but how are YOU doing?

What is going on inside you? How’s your spirit? Do you have a sense of what God’s Spirit may be up to in you during all that’s going on? Got both those things inside don’t we – there is our spirit and there is God’s Spirit...

What’s going on with those in you?

Disruptions can be opportunities to see things we otherwise wouldn’t see - they can reveal things about us - can be a mirror to see what’s going on inside us and allow God to work there; IF WE’RE WILLING to pay attention; to do more than put our nose down and get through it.

Look at this disruption – it’s put restraints on us we haven’t had before; it’s taken away many things we thought we could count on, things we build our lives around.

Suddenly there are severe restraints on our resources, our activities!

Things we thought we could count on have been removed:

We thought we could count on being together – with family and friends – especially at the hospital, or for holidays.

Thought we could count going to the store without worrying about contracting a potentially deadly virus

Thought we could count on having the economy as we knew it, stay that way

All that has been disrupted and our souls are wondering if there is anything solid enough that I can count on it all the time? Something I can count on THIS SIDE OF HEAVEN that’s true not just in my head but in my heart.

**Something I don’t just believe is true; but I experience as true.**

As Christians we believe that’s possible, right – that the way of Jesus isn’t simply assenting to certain beliefs, it is experiencing life a certain way, no matter the circumstances.

That’s what I want to talk with you about today. Connecting our heads and our hearts in ways that heal and strengthen our souls: to take advantage of this disruption to jump start that kind of stuff.

Romans 12 is a chapter in which Paul is encouraging believers to live out the genuine faith that they have. **To live lives that proclaim love and trust in a world that knows only fear, exploitation and suspicion.**

In Romans 12:12 we are given three clauses – for you grammar nerds, they are participles with imperative force – for the rest of us they’re words that talk about who we are freed to be in Christ

It tells us we are to

“Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.” Romans 12:12

Let’s break these down in terms of their original language

Rejoice in hope:

Rejoice basically means experience a sense of well-being, of inner happiness

Hope: the certain expectation that a desire will be fulfilled

Be patient in tribulation

Patient: long-suffering, wait expectantly without boiling over

Tribulation: an oppressive state of physical, mental, social or economic adversity

Be constant in prayer:

Constant – persevere in an activity to a point of devotion

Prayer – talking with, requesting things of God.

Did you notice how many of these words were related to expectations?

We are to **rejoice- to have a sense of well-being** because we EXPECT with certainty that the new heavens and earth are here now truly and will one day be here fully.

Paul talked about this earlier in this letter in 8:18-30. It's guaranteed because Jesus didn't stay dead. That's why Peter calls it a "living hope" in 1 Peter 1:3.

Because that's our expectation we are **patient** with the obstacle course that is life now. When things don't go as planned now, we wait expectantly for God to use this too as part of his plan Romans 5:3-4

We EXPECT God to hear our prayers, Expect prayer to be a source of help for us to be.

What does all this mean in a nutshell? It means that with genuine faith we are a people

**Who are shaken, but not stirred.**

**We are affected by what's happening, but we aren't moved from our love and trust in God.**

We are effected by the things that happen: we don't stop facing the facts, we don't stop feeling the effects of life: we're shaken in that we grieve loss, we are angered by evil, we hurt for people who are alone and have been for weeks, and we feel the pain of kids who just want to go to school with their friends not their parents.

AND at the same time we are not stirred from our belief that God is

At work answering with a yes the prayers we'd pray if we knew everything he knew

At work bringing history to his desired end where the world is the good and perfect: where instead of **violence** there is **friendship**; instead of **frustration** there is **satisfaction**; instead of **exploitation** there is **kindness**.

At work through us in all things as we become more and more the little Christs witnessing to the world

OUR GOD IS GOOD AND WE ARE FORTUNATE TO BE ALIVE IN HIS UNIVERSE

That sounds great Pastor Shelley, but what does that look like in real time?

Well, last week Pastor Doug talked about rejoicing in hope because of the resurrection. And a few weeks before we went into quarantine we spent a couple weeks talking about prayer so with the time we have left I want to focus in on that middle one... being patient in tribulation.

What the text is getting at here isn't a passive putting up with things until they get better, but an active **expression of a living power that comes into our life that we cooperate** with that enables us to wait well.

One of the things it's important to remember any time we talk about doing soul work, is that Jesus was not about giving us techniques to restrain our hearts Jesus wasn't about restraining our hearts he is after changed hearts. And that happens

through experiences of Grace – experiences of God acting on our behalf; and then doing things to cooperate with that experience to make it real.

Think about all the stories where Jesus poured grace into people's lives then told them to do something afterwards; from the put down your nets and follow me to the disciples after their big haul of fish, to the woman caught in adultery who was freed to go and sin no more; to the healed lepers who were to present themselves to the priest.

Do these things to make your experience of my grace – my acting for good in your life – to make it real and lasting.

It's no different today – we receive God's grace – God's acting for good in our life through Jesus Christ and engage in actions that make that grace more and more real to us.

We don't simply try to remember God's grace, we train ourselves to live out of God's grace.

There's a world of difference between trying and training, isn't there?

You can try a sport and you can train in a sport; you can try and play an instrument or you can train in that instrument.

Trying takes a small amount of time and energy; training takes a lot – it means arranging your life a certain way.

The one who tries may or may not get something out of the experience, but the one who trains gets the chance to live freely in the beauty inherent in that activity...

Athletes train to get their body to move without really thinking about it to make that great catch or shot

Musicians train so they can play the notes with freedom becoming one with the music

So many of us have bought the lie that the Christian life isn't about training... that becoming a Christian means we should just be loving, patient, kind — all those fruits of the Spirit should just happen. But that isn't how it works.

As Richard Foster says in his book *The Celebration of Discipline*:

“We often look for a transfusion of what we want to bypass the training, to bypass the misery and give us joy, bypass the frustration and give us patience, bypass the asking and just give us Jesus' insight and mood and actions. But God's desire is to transform the misery, frustration and asking, transform our thoughts and hearts and wills, not bypass them... At times God may give us supernatural infusions of joy or patience but that's not the norm”

So –with that in mind... how do we cooperate with God in being patient people?

We do so by arrange our lives in such a way that with both our head and our heart we remember the story of which we're a part, and how patience plays into that story.

Here's what I mean:

Read your Bible and marvel.

Marvel at God's compassion, his patience with those he loves. Look at how he always comes through for those he loves, how he doesn't hold their ignorance, their stubbornness against them.

Read the story of Israel. God set his love on Israel, not because of anything in them, but because he loved them. Read about how over and over when God's simply trying love on them and love the world through them; they keep resisting it; keep thinking they know a better way,

they refused to change... read the story of Israel and you can't help but find yourself thinking, these have got to be some of the dumbest people who ever lived.

And when they ask God, have we gone too far this time... the reader wants to say “Yes!”

But God never says yes - they never go too far... never go beyond God's love. They are God's beloved and he has compassion on them

Jesus sits looking at Jerusalem weeping with compassion on their ignorance, on their stubbornness... which is about to get him tortured and killed.

<sup>34</sup> O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

Read the story – marvel at Jesus’ compassion and long suffering,

Where his mood isn’t “I’m gonna just have to put up with Israel until something better comes along” No! He moves into their neighborhood; he acts on their behalf in order to transform them into people who love and trust in a world that only knows fear and exploitation and suspicion.

We read the story not to see Jesus as our example; that we better restrain our anger, restrain our hearts so we can act like him no matter how we feel. No, you’re not Jesus in the story- there is one Jesus. We are Israel!

We are God’s beloved and we are ignorant and stubborn and require vast amounts of God’s compassion and long suffering-ness.

Read the story and think you’ve got to be Jesus – you’ll end up exhausted and in defeat.

Read the story and realize that you’re Israel, you will always need God’s grace – God acting for your good. This side of the new heavens and earth, you’ll always need God’s compassion, always need God to bear with you, always need God to be acting on your behalf and **KNOW THAT’S EXACTLY WHAT HE’S** doing!

And you’ll rejoice not only that there is a God who is, but that he is who he is!

**The practices we engage in aren’t about us becoming Jesus but relishing Jesus**, because that is what heals and strengthens our souls.

What are those patience practices? There’s a lot of options let me give you just a couple:

When it comes to practicing being patient with yourself like God is patient with you:

John Ortberg has this great line in his book Soul-Keeping where he says

*Sometimes when I talk to my soul I call it Bob to remind me to be patient with it. Bob’s need for God is enormous, but that’s okay. Bob’s neediness only invites more of God’s generosity.*

I’m in the process of naming my soul – the current front runner is Sharonna – but I haven’t made a final decision; feel free to send suggestions.

When it comes to practices to make real God’s patience with others:

In a famous essay CS Lewis says that next to the sacrament itself, your Christian neighbor is the holiest object ever present to your sight because in him or her the living Christ is truly present.

So when you’re with other people use language about them that reminds you of this. Reminds you that they are holy objects under God’s construction. Just like you are! Maybe you give their soul’s nicknames too?

Lastly, when I read God’s story with patience in mind; I don’t only marvel at Jesus’ compassion but also marvel at the perfection of God’s timing.

Romans 5:6 says at the right time Jesus died for the ungodly – **at the right time.**

God is in control of the timeline; it’s the right timeline. I want it to be his timeline. In my head.

In my heart I want it to be my timeline; I want to be in control of when things happen)

So to practice connecting my head (which says God’s timeline is best) and my heart, which says get out of my way this is happening now, I engage in practices where I learn to wait... to not force my agenda, my timeline.

I purposely driving in the slow lane and practicing not boiling over with people who have no other place to be.

I let my family set the dinner time for way too late in the evening and practice not trying to get them to change it. (Don’t ask how them how that’s going, not good on anyone’s timeline)

Maybe you think they're silly examples – but practicing living on other people's timelines rather than my own to help me rest in God's timeline not being my own.

Does this make sense?

Remembering God's grace to us in Jesus – in his vast compassion and patience with us; and engaging in practices that make that grace real in our lives... these things that heal and strengthen our souls – they are training that lead to freedom in Christ that makes us patient in tribulation.

So I'm inviting you to join Sharonna and me in leaning in to that freedom; into relishing Jesus;

Relishing how good God is and how fortunate we are to be alive in his universe.

Amen.