

Mark 8: 22-26

“It takes time”

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In the land Down Under, the world’s longest continuously running science project is about to have a big moment. After 87 years, the ninth droplet of pitch, which has taken some 14 years to develop, is about to fall. By comparison, watching paint to dry could be considered a Cirque du Soleil spectacle.

The pitch drop experiment was set up in 1927 to measure the flowing capacity of the hard, black, tar derivative through a glass funnel. And how slow does pitch flow? According to Andrew White, a quantum physicist and present custodian of the experiment, says that the whole continent of Australia is drifting faster – six centimeters a year. The pitch drop is 10 times slower than the continental drift.

2014 might be the year for the ninth drop to fall which has people around the world via webcam on the edge of their seats. There are about 18,000 subscribers to [“The Ninth Watch” webcast](#), with an average of 200 people tuned into it at any given time.

This experiment I guess has some importance in the world of science, but the more I think about it, it is much more an experiment in patience.

Patience is not humanity’s strong suit. We live in a world that moves pretty fast, and we have adjusted our way of life accordingly: we want fast results, instant success and quick gratification. We want things to happen, and we want them to happen now! Having to wait for something is a waste of time. We call patience a virtue – a high moral standard – but in reality we try everything not to have to employ patience. The apostle Paul deems patience a fruit of the spirit, something that grows out of our faith and our relationship with God and Christ but honestly we have very little room for patience in our life.

This morning, as we continue our sermon series on *Healing* I am asking the question: what is needed for healing? What aids healing? What is important to include in the healing process? And with the help of the gospel of Mark, last week I suggested that friends and friendship hold a high place in the healing process. This week I want to focus on the role that patience plays.

The dictionary defines the adjective patient as the following:

- * bearing pains or trials calmly;
- * manifesting forbearance under provocation or strain;
- * not hasty or impetuous;
- * steadfast despite opposition, difficulty, or adversity;
- * able or willing to bear.

There are different kinds of patience: To be patient is having the ability to look at a situation objectively enough to prevent it from affecting our mood. It is required not to let the little stuff get to us or get the better of us – the minor or major irritations of everyday life, you know, the things that annoy us.

Patience plays an important part when we take a look at our life and say: this is boring. What am I doing with my life? Yes we could jump from one excitement to another, from one job to another, one busy thing to another without ever thinking about what we are doing and why we are doing it. To have and employ patience is a way of pausing so we give ourselves room and time to ask the hard questions, and to wait and see and search for new insights and answers and solutions to our quest to emerge.

And then there is that patience that enters into our life when we suffer, when we are face with a potentially life-changing illness, when we are faced with loss that seems impossible to bear. Patience is required of us when we assist someone who suffers, a family member or friend. Whether we bear the burden of affliction directly or indirectly, the challenge is to endure that discomfort and wait through it on the road to be healed.

Patience is needed because most of the healing done is gradually and often imperceptibly (with some exceptions).

A simple cold takes days to run its course. Recovery from surgery takes time. Treatment for cancer usually takes weeks and months to get it over with and hopefully see results. And too often that cycle has to be repeated. People who deal with physical disability spent their whole life trying to ease pain and discomfort. Those living with psychological challenges and mental illness often see only small incremental healing if any. And so many of us seek healing for our hearts as we mourn the people we have lost to death along this journey of life. Recovery from bereavement is often a long and arduous path. Healing simply takes time.

Our passage from Mark is interesting in that regard. Healing was not instant in this case like in so many other healing stories. It takes Jesus two tries to restore this man's vision. When Jesus first lays hands on the man, all he can see is a blurred vision of the world. There are no fireworks here, no falling down in spiritual ecstasy, no dramatic "get up and walk" narrative. Healing takes time and most of the time we don't even notice it, until one day we notice, and everything has changed.

When the man isn't cured the first time, Jesus does not blame the man for lack of faith or too much sin or give excuses for his own inability to get the job done right the first time. Jesus simply goes back to work, seeking healing and wholeness for this sight impaired man.

It's interesting that the strong consensus of the Church's teaching over the centuries has been to read this passage as a metaphor for the life of faith. That is, it often takes time for true spiritual insight to arrive. I think this again lines up with the place we are in the story. Thus far, the disciples have perceived Jesus' identity and mission only partially. They will soon encounter Jesus' predictions of his passion and respond with similarly limited insight. Yet in time, after the cross and the announcement of resurrection, they will come to much fuller awareness of Jesus' mission.

I find this interpretation helpful not only in terms of Mark's story or description of the disciples, however, but also in terms of our life of faith as well. How many times have we needed a "second chance" – or, truth be told, third, fourth, fifth, or sixth chances! – to recognize God's presence and activity in our life. This is especially true when God works in ways we wouldn't expect, coming in mercy rather than judgment, for

instance, or in weakness rather than in strength. It is our God who is patient and committed to keep working with us and in us and on us until we fully understand the grace and love our Lord has for us.

Our healing story is good news for us: healing is not about immediate success or sudden transformation. When we are healing from some very serious illness or affliction not just our bodies need to recover and heal but our spirit as well. Both, body and spirit need time to grow into the new life and new way of looking at ourselves. We need time to let our soul catch up with our cells and spirit.

This kind of growing and struggling into that new life is something that I have greatly become aware of in my ministry as I have seen as people go through major health crisis, especially as people are diagnosed with cancer and go through cancer treatment. The news of having cancer of course is devastating but then when a plan of action is put into place, they are off on their path to healing. It is a busy path with schedules of treatments and recovery time in between. It is a very purposeful time. It's a full-time job getting well again.

People are genuinely looking forward to their final treatment, and the initial response is to rejoice but then they have to contend with something else: life after treatment. I think the assumption is that life just continues as it was before the diagnosis of cancer. But in reality, life has changed forever. Beside the physical recovery, there is the emotional recovery. When our lives are threatened, that fear can wreak havoc on our spirits leading them into a post-treatment depression that can be pretty serious. As much as people want to feel their old self, the new self is the one they have to befriend and need to live with from now on. I have heard people ask the question: what now? Where do I go from here? There is no quick fix to those questions, and patience in the process of discovery might be the only remedy for the time being.

I think that deep down we would love to have that which needs healing, healed instantly, like for some people on TV who attend these TV evangelist's healing services. It is a very attractive way for healing for many people. Who would not want to get healed and move on? But those TV evangelists have done us a great disservice. For a long time they have kept me, and maybe you too, from truly claiming and offering the healing ministry that the church has to offer as my own and ours because you and I cannot compete with the miracles they perform right there on the stage. I know of course that these TV healers only focus on success and drama, and the monetary bottom line.

Still, if people want that instant healing, we cannot compete with that by sitting quietly with someone. What will holding their hand really do? What will my prayers do in times when instant healing is sought?

In reality, authentic healing is seldom dramatic but is a gradual process of personal, spiritual, and physical transformation. Sometimes the healing occurs even if the physical symptoms never change. Sometimes people along the way discover a peace that passes anyone's understanding and enables them to respond creatively to what they cannot change.

So I am glad that the writer of Mark included this story in the Bible for it is good news for the healing ministry of the church and for all the people who are on a healing journey and who, at times, might become impatient with the healing process.

Our prayers, our presence and whatever path we pursue in our healing make a difference, but they take time, and God often works within our lives, subtly, persistently, and lovingly to bring forth the healing we need.

Amen.