

Dear People of University Lutheran Church,

Are we there yet? Every parent at some point has become tired of that question. We pull out of the driveway, so excited because we are driving to California and Disneyland, and just over an hour into the drive comes the dreaded chorus, "Are we there yet?" Never mind that we probably have 1,800 miles to go! Patience can be hard when you are 9 years old and you have three days of driving ahead of you. In the same way, patience can be hard for adults in the midst of a coronavirus pandemic. We wonder when it will be safe to go back to work, and when life will become at least somewhat normal again.

Before we feel too sorry for ourselves, let's consider Noah. Can you imagine what it was like for Noah and his family to be in the ark for over a year with all those animals? "Are we there yet?" This seems like a perfectly legitimate question, if you're spending approximately 370 days in an ark during a great flood with seven other family members, and one pair of every animal species. How did everyone feel on days 120, 240 and 360? I don't know how to say it in ancient Hebrew, but yes, "Are we there yet?" must have crossed their minds more than once. I bet the Lord became tired of hearing it too.

This time of the coronavirus pandemic has indeed made patience a dilemma for us. Some people in the country are protesting governors and demanding to go back to work. Other people who have lost their jobs because of the virus are praying for a return to normal life and employment before they completely run out of money. Some people have grown weary of spending every day in the same house with the same people. Other people who have underlying health conditions which make them more vulnerable to the virus, wonder if there will ever be the right time to return to work or normal life.

I cannot tell you how to be patient. Sometimes I think patience is somehow genetic. Certain people are more patient than others. However, I can give you a reason to be patient. This reason comes from the Bible and Almighty God himself. The Lord says this in Jeremiah 29:11, "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope." People often say everything happens for a reason. Please don't be upset with me when I say this, but I don't always agree that everything – good and bad – happens for a reason.

What I do believe, however, is that God is planner. God has all sorts of plans for his people, and as the Lord said in Jeremiah 29:11, these plans are not for harm, but for good and hopeful futures. This means that even when we are going through a time such as this, when a virus is causing the whole human race all sorts of trouble, when people are getting sick and some are dying, when peoples' lives and livelihoods are being upset and in some cases ruined, God still has a plan for us which includes a hopeful future. In some cases, this hopeful future is here in the world, and in other cases, it is with God in heaven.

In the meantime, I suggest everyone meditate on these words of the Apostle Paul from Romans 12:12, "Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer." While patience may be hard while we are suffering, hoping in the Lord, and saying daily prayers are always helpful in such times. In particular, our prayers are so key. Remember when you pray the Lord is near. As you speak, his ear is pressed against your mouth. As you listen, his mouth is pressed against your ear. With the Lord so close to you, I trust you will wait more patiently for your hopeful future, even if you are not there yet.

You are in my prayers,
Pastor Tom