

“But with their patience worn out by the journey ... ”

- Numbers 21:4b

The journey of life tests me and wears out my patience. I must acknowledge this truth, because the experience is unavoidable. Life takes me to the limits of my abilities and competencies where I feel incompetent and incomplete at times. This is not a desirable condition, especially when I live in a culture that teaches self-reliance and expects self-mastery. To be impatient is to encounter and challenge the illusion that things should go my way, that I should be self-reliant and in control of myself and my situation. Impatience indicates that my assumptions are challenged.

The Israelites, worn out by their journey, complain against God and Moses. They are hungry, thirsty and tired. They are impatient and frustrated. Their story tells us not just to expect suffering in our lives, it reveals the reason for and the way through impatience and suffering.

To be *patient* means “to suffer; to bear adversity.” To be *a patient* means “one who suffers.” My impatience is God’s way of trying to de-stabilize my illusions, bringing me to a greater reality. Impatience is the doorway to a world-view revolution that puts God at the center instead of me. God does not protect me from suffering or being impatient. Rather, it is through my impatience that I encounter God and God transforms me. I arrive at the realization that I am not God and that I need God’s grace.

Seeing patients primarily as sufferers in need of care is a different perspective from viewing them as consumers of health care or occupiers of hospital beds. They feel dependent, not in control and anxious. I experience healing when I allow another person to be with me in my impatience and suffering. Patients expect this of caregivers—someone willing to accompany them through adversity, to share in their impatience and suffering.

I am invited to pay attention to my impatience. When I feel impatient, I know that God is trying to reach me.

What is God trying to teach me?

How can I use this awareness to accompany others?