

Advent 3
December 11, 2016

“Waiting Patiently for Jesus to Return”

JAMES 5:7-11

Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸ You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. ¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

These words we just read to you were written by a man named James. This is not the James who was the brother of John, the first of Jesus' disciples to die for his faith, beheaded by King Herod. This is another James, the half brother of Jesus, one of the sons of Mary and Joseph. At first he had a hard time believing that his brother Jesus was the Messiah. But then by God's grace this brother of the Lord became a believer and the leader of the Christian church in Jerusalem.

This James, this leader in the church, saw lots of pain and suffering for Christians living in Jerusalem. Early in this letter he writes, "Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance." Whenever we go through periods of pain and suffering, especially pain and suffering for our faith, it is easy to lose patience. Early Christians were wondering why Jesus was taking so long to return. If Jesus returned they would not have to worry about being put to death or put in prison for their faith, or lose their jobs or be driven from their homes.

This morning we want to take a closer look at these words before us from James the brother of the Lord. What he says here about patience will help us to wait patiently for Jesus to return on clouds of glory.

Be patient with the Lord

First, let's be patient with our Lord. If Jesus doesn't return this week in clouds of glory, we don't want to lose our patience with him. "Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming." The word used here for patience has the thought of being long suffering, of putting up with a lot of pain. The thought of Jesus coming soon is the best therapy there is for pain and suffering of any kind. When my mother was suffering from pain and anxiety because of lack of circulation in her legs, I said to her, "Mom, what if Jesus came right now on clouds of glory?" She had a big smile on her face and said, "Wouldn't that be wonderful."

We are living in a day and age of instant gratification. If I cannot pay for it now I will put it on the credit card. If the internet site does not load up immediately, I will go to another

site. If the traffic slows down I get irritated. Starbucks intentionally has multiple stores within blocks of each other to gratify the desire to have a cup of coffee and have it now. But with Jesus return, I have to be patient. If he does not come today, I know he can come tomorrow. That makes whatever pain I am experiencing to be more bearable.

James offers us the example of the farmer planting his seed to help us be patient with the Lord's promise to come quickly. "See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains." Farmers in the land of Israel depended on the autumn rains to germinate the seed they planted in the fields and the spring rains to cause the plants to grow. The same is true here in California. The hills are green because the rain we have had recently has caused the seeds to sprout and grow. We will need more rain in the months ahead to cause the grass to grow. In a good year, with lots of rain, the wild oats will be higher than the bellies of the cattle grazing on the hills.

With rain, there is no promise given of abundant rains, but with Jesus there is the promise that he will come again soon. James says, "You too be patient and stand firm because the Lord's coming is near." The word here for standing firm is the same word used to describe Jesus determined to go up to Jerusalem to suffer and die for us. What do you see on Jesus' face as he goes up to Jerusalem for the last time? You see determination. What do you see on the faces of your fellow Christians in these last days, even those going through suffering and pain? You see determination, you see resolve, you see them eagerly looking out the window each day thinking, "This may be the day my Savior is coming in clouds of glory." Jesus even gives us signs such as earthquakes, wars, false teaching in the church, and the love of many growing cold to help us remember his return could be soon. Every day we learn to patiently wait for his return. That is the best pain management program there is.

Be patient with other Christians

When Christians go through pain and suffering, especially unfair pain and suffering for their faith, it is easy to lose patience with each other. James has good advice here. "Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!" This word for grumbling can also be translated as groaning. It is used in Romans 8 to describe how all of creation groans with eager expectation for a new heaven and new earth. This is a good kind of groaning. But then there is the bad groaning that takes place when brothers and sisters in Christ groan inside as they lose patience with other Christians who may be suffering. Why can't they keep their life together the way I can?

Look at your own life. Remember when you lost patience with your husband or wife. Often it results in unfair criticism, snarky remarks, or impatient words. Remember the road trip with the kids in the back seat of the car. As they lost their patience, they began bickering and fighting with each other. Even Christians suffering from persecution and other problems of life can take out their frustrations by losing patience with each other.

And what is the therapy or antidote for losing patience with each other? It is realizing that the Judge is at the door! How can I even begin to think about being impatient with other brothers and sisters in Christ if I realize that Jesus could come at any moment in clouds of

glory. Ephesians 4 says, "In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are angry, and do not give the devil a foothold."

During WW2 a young soldier was able to get some time off and he wanted to get home in the worst way to surprise his young bride to be. He knocked at her door. And what was she doing? Was she have a party with her friends? Was she in the arms of another man? No, he caught her sitting at the table in her tiny apartment reading the letters he had been sending her. So the beautiful bride of Christ, his Church, reads the letters he has sent to her in the Holy Scriptures. The last thing we want to do if he knocks at the door is to be found engaging in sinful behavior such as being unfairly judgmental and critical of brothers and sisters in Christ who are going through a rough patch in their lives and having a hard time holding it all together. Be patient with one another. The Judge is at the door.

Be patient like those from the past

To help us be patient with the Lord and with each other, we have wonderful examples of people from the past who were given patience from the Lord even though they had their moments when they were not patient. "Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord." The book of Hebrews tells us how much the prophets suffered in the past for the name of the Lord, yet it was the Lord who kept their hope alive and gave them patience. "Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put into prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated- the world was not worthy of them." Do you think they sometimes lost their patience? I do. It was the Lord who constantly restored their patience just as he does for us when we go through difficult days. Hebrews 11 goes on to say, "God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."

In our Gospel for today, we heard about John the Baptist being in prison and sending his disciples to ask if Jesus was the Messiah. Before we become too critical of John the Baptist for losing his patience, perhaps we should spend some time in prison and see what it can do to our faith. Jesus restores him, rebuilds his patience and trust by sending the disciples with a firsthand report of the miracles Jesus was performing and how the good news was being preached.

James also points us to the example of Job. "As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy." It was the Lord who made it possible for Job to say, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." It was the Lord who allowed Job to confess at one of the lowest times of his life, "I know that my Redeemer lives.." It was the Lord who answered Job out of a storm and spoke of the wonders of his creation. This led Job to confess "Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." Here was a man who momentarily lost his patience with God but then he is given new patience that confesses, "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know."

The ultimate example of patience is that our Lord Jesus. He patiently endured the shame

of having our sin placed on him and he patiently suffered everything necessary to pay for every sin every committed including those times we have lost our patience. Hebrews 12 says, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Jesus joyfully endured the cross and shame for our sin. He sits on the right hand of his heavenly Father working with you and me individually to help us patiently wait for him to come again in clouds of glory. Perhaps you have heard people say in a somewhat joking way, "Lord give me patience and give it to me now." From what we have heard from James this morning it is OK to pray for patience and pray for it right now. Waiting patiently for Jesus to return helps us face the aches and pains of this life whatever they might be. It is OK to pray impatiently, "Even so Lord Jesus come quickly." Amen.