**James 5:7-11** December 11, 2022

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Advent 3

*James 5:7 Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. 8You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near. 9Don’t grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! 10Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11As 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.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**So, what do you think of waiting rooms?**

You sit there with half a dozen others. There may be a dozen chairs, but with seven people the room is at capacity because the unwritten rule in all waiting rooms is: There must be one empty chair between each person or couple. Mostly it’s silent. Sometimes a newcomer walks in and gives a “Hello” if you happen to make eye contact. Finally, a door opens and a name is called. The man opposite you jumps out of his chair and through the door. He’s free! The rest of you watch him, more than a little jealous because his time in the waiting room is over, but not yours.

I have still to meet a person who enjoys waiting rooms. Even the advent of cell phones has hardly helped. I suppose we could talk about it for a while and maybe come up with the reason it’s so tough. Let it just be enough to say that waiting rooms are their own peculiar form of torment.

***“Be patient, brothers”*** comes up three times in our short reading. Variations pop up throughout the Bible. Like mothers with their youngsters in dentists’ offices, God’s Word reminds us, time and again, ***“Be patient,”***—always with the promise that something better is on its way.

Last Sunday, we heard about that something better. It was in Isaiah chapter 11. Isaiah described that something better as the Branch of Jesse, the promised, wise, merciful Messiah. He will usher in a kingdom of righteousness and peace. Maybe you remember that verse: *“the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them”*?

This Sunday, God’s word isn’t so much about the Advent King, as it is about us waiting for the Advent King. Admittedly, at times, waiting for Jesus is about as much fun as a waiting room. Sometimes, like for John the Baptist, it’s way worse. Children of God spending a lifetime in this world need patience.

**I. What is Patience?**

Patience is how we deal with situations that are not the way we want them to be. And maybe that is the place to start thinking about patience—not what patience is, but situations that require patience. We need patience when what is happening is not what we want to be happening.

The very first words of this short book of the Bible—you could read James in less time than it takes for me to preach this sermon—began, *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.”* James begins by saying that life has a lot of unpleasant stuff, and ends by telling us that the main way of dealing with that truth is patience.

When we read the rest of the book, one of the big trials for these Christians was that they were oppressed by people with the upper hand in society. That was bad enough. But these oppressed Christians did something that human nature has always tended to do. Ask teachers what causes the most misbehavior in the classroom, and they will say that the number one cause is homelife issues that are being acted out at school. It seems that James’ Christians similarly took their mistreatment that happened out in the world and brought their baggage to church. From the letter of James we find out that there was lots of malicious gossip, unloving and strong language, favoritism and materialism going on.

It is not right, but we sort of understand. It is difficult to live through bad things and not in some way pass it on to someone else. James knew that a lot of the un-Christian behavior among these people was a result of what they were going through and not dealing with in a positive way. So he told them, ***“Be patient.”*** Patience should be prominent in every Christian life.

In Galatians 5, there is a familiar list: *“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,”* and what’s the next one?  *“Patience…”* Patience is a gift of the Holy Spirit living in you.

In 1 Corinthians 13 there is that tribute to Christian love. (Once I read a little of it you will remember it.) *“Love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud…”* and so on. But do you know how that tribute begins? *“Love is patient.”* It’s the very first thing on the list. When you love, you are patient. Love is not quick to jump to conclusions or walk out or make demands. Quickness to jump to conclusions, walk out or make demands, in short, impatience, is a lack of love.

One of *God’s* primary characteristics in dealing with humanity is patience. He is slow to anger, not wanting anyone to perish, but giving us time to repent. He doesn’t have to be that way. We have sinned. We deserve punishment. But God is patient, even with sinners.

Patience is a slowness to anger or frustration, even when things are not the way they should be. But patience isn’t really mostly about being slow to act. It is mostly about taking time to remember the final goal. Let me say that again, because I think that’s a common misunderstanding about patience. Patience isn’t mostly about being slow to act. It is about taking time to remember the goal.

You see, patience often is slow to act, not because being slow to act is a virtue in and of itself, but because being slow to act allows you the time to compare your instant and visceral reaction against God’s long-term plan and desires for you.

Patience looks at the challenges this world throws at you and it keeps in mind eternity with Christ. Patience suffers through years or a lifetime of financial distress, because you remember that Christ said our real treasure is in heaven. Patience can suffer through the sorrow of bad personal relationships because our Lord is always, always, always faithful in his relationship to you. Christian patience endures a world that is opposed to you, yet it continues to live out its faith, and joyfully! Christian patience hears Satan’s temptations—and some of those are ever so appealing and exciting to the sinful nature!—yet Christian patience says, “How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God!”

You see, patience isn’t just about doctors’ waiting rooms. Oh, how trivial! Patience is a guiding principle of Christian life!

**II. What Is Patience Worth? What’s Its Value?**

Patience is valuable because patience yields valuable returns.

Patience is good for relationships. Patience makes for solid decision making. Patience make people trust you. Yet if our view of patience is just a pragmatic view, like, “Be patient, because it will help you get ahead in life,” then we have reduced God-pleasing morality to a loaf of bread or a wad of cash—because it pays. That’s pure selfishness.

Patience is good for far more than that. Speaking for myself, many of the moments of my life I most regret, the things that I would change if I could do it all over again, probably more often than not they happened because of my lack of patience. I didn’t wait to hear all that someone was saying. I reacted before I knew the full story. Sometimes it was a heart venting its frustrations on people who needed patience and understanding. Sometimes impatience led me to take what I wanted in my time rather than waiting for God to give his blessings in his time. Patience prevents much sin. This is the true value of patience.

Three times in three verses James mentions patience. Three times in three verses he mentions Jesus’ second coming. You see, since the Christian’s goal is to be ready for Jesus’ second coming, patience is God’s gift that helps keep us in our faith. It keeps us from sin. It focuses us on the end. It reminds us that the troubles of the here and now are things we should not be frustrated by because they are temporary and small. Acting on patience is a way to say thank you to God for his great patience with us. Patient Christians are children who please their Father in heaven.

**III. How Do You Get Patience?**

If our patience pleases God, then how can we get it?

Some people will think about pursuing patience and then say, “I’m not a very patient person.” It sort of becomes an excuse to not even try. As if to say, “Since I am naturally impatient, it would be unreasonable to expect me to be patient.” There is a tiny grain of truth somewhere at the bottom of that. We each have our own personalities. Some *do* find it easier to be patient than others. But that in no wise excuses the sin of impatience, any more than predispositions to laziness, anger, or sexual immorality of any form are excuses for those sins.

Add in this truth: weakness in patience not only means that one will have to work harder at it than others, it also means that person will probably have to go to the Lord for forgiveness over impatience more often. Face those facts and then cling to God’s merciful forgiveness. The last sentence of our reading reminds us, ***“The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.”*** That is the impatient person’s source of hope and God’s glory.

But the question remains, how do we cultivate patience? In that pursuit James directs us to three examples.

First, is the farmer. The farmer doesn’t base what he does on today’s weather. If a farmer’s hopes were all wrapped up in the current day’s weather, he would go mad! When James speaks of the autumn and spring rains, he has in mind the climate of Palestine. Let’s think in terms of Kentucky. The farmer operates assuming that in April the sun will shine, the ground will warm. Therefore, even months before he can actually plant his fields he gets ready. He is patient, but he doesn’t sit on his hands. He does what he is supposed to now, trusting what is coming in the future.

James’ second example is the prophets. They suffered greatly. Many, like John the Baptist, were even put to death. But they patiently spoke the word of God. They knew whom they served. They knew their message had the power to save, and so they patiently proclaimed it no matter what came.

Finally James points to Job. He too suffered greatly, but even as he suffered loss of family and wealth and health he said, *“Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble… The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised”* (2:10; 1:21) He trusted God’s goodness no matter what the moment held.

Each of these three—the farmer, the prophets and Job—kept the big picture in front of them. They didn’t know what each day would bring, but they did know what God would do in the end, and they focused on that. We have the same confidence in Christ Jesus our Savior. It is a rock-solid confidence that in the end Christ will come again. Meanwhile we wait patiently—no, we *live* patiently, no matter what happens.

Sitting in waiting rooms may seem to take forever. The fact that you are here today tells us that it doesn’t. You waited. You had your appointment. You made it out. Think of earth as a waiting room. We wait. Not all of it is pleasant. We wait a long time, a lifetime. But we don’t wait forever. Finally a name will be called, God-willing a long time from now, and you will be called heavenward to your Lord. While you wait for that awesome moment, be joyfully patient. Amen.