

Genesis 19:15 With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished.” ¹⁶When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them. ¹⁷As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, “Flee for your lives! Don’t look back, and don’t stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!” ...

²³By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. ²⁴Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens. ²⁵Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land. ²⁶But Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

²⁷Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the LORD. ²⁸He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace. ²⁹So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.

Dear Friends in Christ,

We have a saying in English. You have heard it: “Patience is a virtue.” You know why we have that saying, right? Because we don’t think patience is a virtue. We hate being patient.

Our world is built on not being patient. Isn’t the saying, “Seize the day!” Doesn’t it bother you, I mean really bother you, when the internet connection is slow? Have you ever been honked at when it took you more than ½ second to move off a stop light turned green? What impatient people! (Or maybe you were the one doing the honking.) What places do people most hate to go? The DMV, the post office, and the bank—because you have to wait in line! And I haven’t even mentioned to doctor’s offices and Black Friday checkout lines!

We hate waiting. That’s why our mothers or grandmothers told us, “Patience is a virtue.” They were trying to add a little sugar to the bitter medicine that sometimes you just have to wait!

(Having said that, we all want people to be patient with us. When we are having a bad day, we want people to make allowances. When we are new to a job, we wish people would be understanding. As we age and our reaction times slow, we wish those young whippersnappers in their Camaros behind us at the stoplights could learn a little patience.)

There are many aspects of patience, but in an achievement oriented society like ours, we consider situations that require patience to be a waste of time because we have to be passive; we accomplish nothing.

One of God’s virtues is patience. But his patience is never passive, and it is never because he *has* to wait. God is patient in a way we seldom choose to be. He is patient by choice. Yet even as he is patient, he is active. These aspects of God’s patience become apparent as we watch God deal with Lot in God’s word today. We see God’s

PROACTIVE PATIENCE

Advent is a time of waiting. A time of waiting for Christmas, for the coming of God's promised one. But on this first Sunday of Advent God's word today directs us to think not of our patience for God to fulfill his promises, but of God's patience with us fallen people! This proactive patience is so apparent in the life of Lot, and it gives us yet another reason to praise our God!

I. To a Man Who Needed to Be Saved

So who is this Lot guy we heard about? And who were those men standing in his living room? And why were they giving him evacuation orders?

Lot was a nephew of the well-known Bible figure Abraham. Nephew and uncle had lived together, until a falling out. Still, they managed to part on good terms, but they parted. Abraham was a stalwart man of faith, who built a church wherever he moved. He prayed regularly. He listened to God, even when it hurt. Lot, wasn't quite so steadfast. A believer, yes. But wealth had a great appeal to him, and easy wealth the more so. Social status imposed its obligations on his thinking. And so as Lot moved away from Abraham, chapters 14 to 19 of Genesis chronicle the gravitational pull the city of Sodom, the original Sin City, had on Lot's soul.

The twin cities of Sodom and Gomorrah have come down to us as proverbial dens of immorality, iniquity and sin. These real cities were homes to all kinds of sin, not least of which was their embrace of homosexuality. Because of their many sins, God decided that he would carry out a judgment on those cities on a catastrophic level.

God had been patient with these cities. He had given them a preacher of righteousness, namely Lot, but they had rejected Lot's message. God was also patient with Lot. Though his heart had been partially captivated by these Sin Cities, God knew that the flame of faith still flickered in Lot's heart. So God sent two messengers, two angels to go and warn Lot to flee the cities before they were destroyed.

These messengers, angels, had arrived the day before our reading. They had strongly warned Lot and family to leave the city, to evacuate before destruction from heaven. They had given a six hour evacuation order, "*Do you have anyone else here—sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, because... the outcry to the LORD against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it*" (verses 12-13). But Lot frittered away the night. He kind of / sort of started packing up and getting ready to leave, but he couldn't quite do it.

In the middle of his procrastination our reading begins, "*With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, 'Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished.'*" The six hour evacuation order was now an immediate evacuation order. "The fire is coming! A matter of minutes. Get out!" Leave it all to save your life!

II. To a Man Who Didn't Want to Be Saved

There is a piece of advice most parents at some point give to their young adult children: "If a thief ever says, 'Give me your wallet!' You give him your wallet. Whatever is in your wallet can be replaced. Your life can't be." Remember that speech? And if you were a teen-age boy

like me – don't know how teen-age girls think about this – but teen-age boys, their first reaction is, "No way. I can't just let you take my stuff!" That is the natural human, or at least male, reaction to people who want to take your stuff. But after you think about it you realize the valuable truth. It may be a real pain to replace the credit cards and driver's license, but if you lose your life...

And there are people like that, who ignore the evacuation order, who cling to what they have, who can't stand to part with the cheap mementos and faded pictures—and who lose their life.

And Lot stood there. His mind had been poisoned. He had preached against it, but there was something about Sodom that he couldn't leave. Maybe the destruction wouldn't be so bad. Maybe it wouldn't happen at all. Maybe he would somehow survive. God could protect him.

Oh, how patient God was! His isn't a sit-on-your-hands sort of patience! It is a proactive, grab-them-by-the-hands patience. ***"When [Lot] hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them."*** They had played with sin for two decades. When God came to give them final warnings—actual angels in the living room—Lot couldn't quite pull himself away. So God mercifully ripped him out of the sin that was about to rob him of his soul.

Dear God, how merciful you are! That you do this for us, when we like swine wallow in our sins, when we choose to ignore your Word and your messengers, you still send more and more up to the last moment of our lives to save us, to save us kicking and screaming, like a burning stick snatched from the fire. How great your mercy and compassion is! How great Jesus' love was to bleed and die for people like us!

You know as well as I do that there were moments in your life when you toyed with sin. Times when your parents, or a Christian friend, or a pastor or elder told you, "You need to cut this out!" and you hesitated. You delayed. You weren't sure. And somehow God took your hand and saved you from the destruction you had chosen.

We remember Sodom and Gomorrah for the fiery destruction that rained down upon them. Perhaps we think of them as signs of God's divine displeasure with the sin of homosexuality. But let this be the Bible passage we remember from the story of Sodom and Gomorrah: ***"The men grasped [their] hands... for the LORD was merciful to them."***

God has maintained a relationship of love and grace toward us through the years, even though we have often transgressed. It is based on the infinite forgiveness that Christ won for us dying on a cross. It is based on the sinless life he lived to keep God's commands for us who do not. He maintains this relationship through his proactive patience, that has no greater desire than to save us for eternity. So he, day after day, year after year, sends us his messengers. ***"The LORD was merciful to them, to us."***

Let us never take those messengers for granted because God's patience will end. There will be a last time in our lives that the sun rises over the eastern horizon, and after that it will not again. So let us not wait, but heed God's evacuation order today. Let us leave behind the sin that entices, the worldly baubles that dazzle our weak minds, let us flee to the place designated by God.

III. Because of a Believer's Prayer

There is an epilogue to the Lot narrative, an epilogue contained in the last three verses of our reading. A couple hours later, about 30 miles away, on a mountain ridge, stood a man, a watcher. This man was looking, searching his southeastern horizon for news. ***“Early the next morning Abraham got up and... looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace.”*** There were no cell phones, no radio, but he knew what had happened. Then God’s Word adds this: ***“When God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.”***

The previous day, the LORD had appeared to Abraham, Lot’s uncle, and told him. “I am going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.” And because Abraham knew his nephew, Lot, lived in those Sin Cities, Abraham prayed. And you know his prayer: “Please LORD, you are righteous. Don’t destroy the righteous and unrighteous. If there are 50 righteous people, don’t destroy those wicked cities.” And then he went on, “Or 40, or 30, or even just 10 believers.”

Well, the LORD couldn’t find 10, so he resolved to destroy the cities. But the sacred record says ***“God remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out.”*** We don’t know if Abraham ever knew what happened to Lot. At least in the pages of Scripture they never met again. But the LORD rescued Lot. Because of his compassion, yes, but also because of Abraham’s prayer. In fact, it gives you the impression that if Abraham had not prayed, Lot would not have been saved.

Let that be a reminder to you who pray for your family members in their weakness, your friends in another land. God listens to your prayers on behalf of those who perhaps do not have the faith to pray, or who have been so confused by the world that they don’t pray. God listens to you, and he even changes the course of the world for you who cry out to him day and night. You may never know. My guess is that you probably will know almost none of the things that your prayers change. Don’t let that stop you. Keep praying. Because God is patient. And you praying, gives God another reason to continue being proactively patient.

Like a child with a lost pet, asking dad to drive around the block one more time, you praying gives God another reason to be just a little more patient. Proactively patient, using the borrowed time to call, to restore, to save. Amen.