

James 5:7-20
Pentecost 19 + Proper 21B + September 20, 2018
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho
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Patiently Endure!

"Be patient." Those words from our Epistle text are certainly appropriate in many situations. We wait patiently for the light to change. Parents of young children wait patiently for them to finish their food or pick up their toys. Hopefully. As James noted, farmers wait for crops to be ready for harvest. In so many instances, all we can do is be patient.

The sermon theme of "Patiently Endure" introduces another element, the aspect of suffering while waiting. Many of you are familiar with that as well. Whether it's going on right now, or at some previous time, most of you know what it's like to patiently endure. Life doesn't always go as we had planned or as we would like. Unforeseen illness can interrupt our lives or the lives of loved ones. Time spent in the hospital or recuperating at home can drag on and on. While doctors do their best to bring about healing, often conditions are such that weeks and months of treatment and regaining strength are needed. All you can do is patiently endure.

Patient endurance is also called for with suffering that doesn't involve our physical health. Financial hardship usually takes longer to overcome than it did to develop. When relationships are damaged by sin, it can take great amounts of time and effort to make them whole again. In any of these areas, it's not necessarily our action that brought about the suffering. In a world tainted and broken by sin; sickness, poverty, trial, and troubled relationships can happen in ways that we can't prevent. All we can do is patiently endure.

That is also true in spiritual matters. Sometimes we wonder, "Will it ever end?" In the Church there are trials and temptations. We see religions like Islam and others who don't have the gospel growing rapidly in America and around the world. We grieve as we see other Christian denominations losing their way---abandoning the solid foundation of God's Word and compromising its truth for the sake of popular appeal. Focusing more on the person and their feelings than on Christ and His finished work. In our culture, Christians who hold on to what God gives in His Word can suffer the subtle rejection of being considered rigid and hateful. In other countries, Christians who openly live out their faith suffer opposition, torment, and even outright persecution. So what shall we do? Patiently Endure!

The members of the early Christian Church lived in perilous times. It was dangerous to be a follower of Christ. His followers were persecuted; they were scattered. However, they still believed. The Epistle of James was written to people whose faith was challenged. He urged them to focus on the returning Christ. *"Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord."*

He's coming! This was great news for their weary ears. Jesus would return, and when He did, their troubles would end. There would be no more rejection, no more persecution, no more trials or sorrow. James was looking ahead, past the present difficulties. This James was a leader of the church in Jerusalem and very influential. He lived his life in anticipation of the return of Jesus. Christ *is* coming again. Of that we can be sure! Throughout the Scriptures, we hear this assurance. Jesus said, *"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne."*

As James wrote, he was concerned about the endurance of the people. Would they hold on to their faith? He encouraged them to keep focused on the coming Lord. His directions hold true for today. We too can patiently endure because God is with us and Christ is coming.

The Lord is coming, but we don't know when! In the midst of lengthy trials and changing circumstances we can hang on and be ready by keeping our eyes focused on Jesus. Being patient means to hold on, to bear up under suffering. It is spiritual patience that does not give up, but instead holds on to the promise of Christ.

How do we acquire such patience? It is a fruit of the Spirit, granted to us by God through the Word and Sacraments. Knowing that Christ has come for us, that He gave His life as the once-and-for-all-sacrifice for our sins, we can live by the Spirit. We can face each new day confidently, knowing that Christ will return for His Church, to bring us to His eternal Kingdom.

God is with us, so we can patiently endure. God will be with us as He was with the prophets during their trials. He will keep us strong in the faith, as we remain steadfastly fixed upon the return of Christ. Fixing our eyes upon the end of this life and the beginning of the next, the compassion and mercy of God will continue to flow in and through us. God will deliver us. Near the beginning of his letter James wrote: *"Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him."*

Farmers have plenty of things to do while waiting for the crops to be ready. They can make sure all of their equipment is in top running order. They can get all the odd jobs out of the way so that hopefully nothing disrupts them during the busy harvest. They can keep doing what they always do.

What shall we Christians do as we patiently endure? If we are keeping our eyes focused on the return of Christ, that anticipation will guide our response. What is the appropriate response as we patiently endure? Our text provides quite a number of suggestions.

James counsels his readers, *"Establish your hearts."* We can use the time to grow in our faith, to become well-grounded so that we can not only resist the trials and temptations of the world, but help others to resist them. As the crop grows, the farmer battles pests and weeds so that the crop can reach its yield potential. We too must battle the pesky lies and half-truths that would weaken or destroy our faith, and those weed-like cares of the world, all the things that keep us busy and crowd out the Savior. We can establish our hearts and grow in our faith by receiving God's grace in Word and Sacrament. *The Lord is compassionate and merciful.* In the means of grace He pours out His love upon us to forgive our sins and to strengthen us for whatever trial we must patiently endure.

James writes: *"Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray."* Until Christ returns, Christians will have challenges and temptation, testing and persecution. In such times, we seek God's help and guidance. Through good times and bad, we draw on God's power and strength so we can face those things that oppose us.

Behind and beneath the earthly battles with illness and adversity is an underlying spiritual battle. Our old evil foe the devil tries to use any difficult circumstance to weaken our faith and separate us from Christ. We might mistakenly feel that we are all alone, that we're the only ones having difficulty. When we battle our spiritual foes, we ask God for help and we are not alone. God supplies all our needs. He is with us, but sometimes we forget that He is there. By praying, we give our problems to God. He hears us, and He promises to be with us. In all circumstances we can respond to the gracious invitation of Jesus: *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."*

James continues, *"Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, (that refers to pastors) and let them pray over him."* When there is serious illness or other trial, don't suffer alone. Seek the prayers of your church, your pastor, and others who care about you. God heals, but illnesses can often be used by God to bring us closer to Him. Sometimes we want to feel independent, and we lose sight of Christ and the care He provides through His people, the church.

Our text contains the promise: *"And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven."* This promise must be understood in view of eternal things. Until Christ returns, physical death will be an unavoidable end in this fallen world. We are guaranteed being saved from eternal death, but not recovery from every illness. *"Raise him up"* is a promise of the Last Day, not of a certain physical cure. When the sick and the oppressed focus on the ultimate deliverance of salvation and resurrection, the trials they endure

become more bearable. Indeed, Christ will raise us up, for He has shed His blood to provide the forgiveness of sins. Of that we can be sure!

We pray, not just when we are sick, not just for life-threatening issues, but for the whole life. Prayer is powerful, but the power is not from us. The prayer of faith is God working in the believer. He has made us His own people. He creates faith in us and enables us to live in that faith, turning everything over to Him. In faith we rely upon Him, that in His gracious mercy we might live out our faith. We have a mighty God, who has done miraculous and marvelous things for us. So we hang on until He calls us home, confidently living each day as His forgiven saints.

James writes, *"Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise."* Whether our prayers are answered with earthly healing and relief or by deliverance into the joys of heaven, we can rejoice, giving thanks for the good times. Paul invites us in 1 Thess. 5, *"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances."*

There is more we can do as we patiently endure *until the coming of the Lord*. We can live honestly and openly, being trustworthy and dependable so that others can rely on us. When our yes is yes and our no is no, we won't need to make wild guarantees so that others will trust us.

While we wait, we can be about the work of restoring relationships. God doesn't want us to become comfortable with or resigned to brokenness within our families or the larger family of God. He calls us to actions that can restore. James instructs us, *"Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another."* We have all offended God and other people, but God for the sake of His mercy sent His Son to pay all the debt of our sins. Confessing them to God and each other, He forgives us and restores relationships.

James was concerned about doctrinal purity. It does matter what we believe, teach, and confess. We live in a time when many have compromised the truth and many don't know the truth. James said, *"My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins"* Those words indicate that we should reach out with caring concern to those who are wandering apart from Christ and His saving word.

Friends in Christ, as we see the day approaching, there is much to do. We will face trials and tribulations; we will be tempted to depart the faith or to take it for granted, or treat it as something only important later on. While we wait, we keep our eyes on Christ. He has done great things for us and greater things are in store for us. They are so great that words cannot describe them. So keep the faith! Hold on, it won't be long. The Lord is coming. He's at the door! Amen.