

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Advent 3 -- December 12th, 2010

James 5:7-11

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. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 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.

Dear children of God.

Let's take a walk back in time to when things were much slower. How about the times, when the internet came through a dial-up connection and every time you tried to connect you heard that sort of fuzzy sound followed by some beeps and you hoped and prayed that you were connected to the Internet. Then you had the joy of waiting sometimes as much as a hour to download a big file. Today we have high speed internet that can download that same big file in minutes or less. Do you remember how you found out about worldly news twenty years ago. You turned the nightly news and heard the news for today. You didn't have hour by hour updates on your smartphones or from Internet sights. Do you remember what life was like before microwaves, especially the reheating of leftovers? Do you remember life without remote controls for our TVs and other electronic devices or the good old days when you wanted to look up a fact about something meant getting out the encyclopedia and paging to the right place. Boy was that slow! And most of us would have to admit. We hate to wait! We hate things that slow us down. We are not a very patient nation of people

The devil knows that, of course. That's why he is always whispering in our ear, "You don't have to wait." But he is not talking about phone internet versus DSL or cable. He is talking about things more serious. He tells us, "You don't have to wait for marriage to enjoy sex." "You don't have to wait until your parents or the law tells you it's OK to do something you want to do now." "You don't have to hang in there through the tough times of your marriage when you can move on and be happier." "You don't have to wait for what you want...when just a little bit of cheating or lying can give you a short cut to your goal." "You don't have to wait to buy something you can't afford right now. Everybody is in debt." But have you discovered that not waiting comes at a cost?

"You don't have to wait" is just another one of the devil's many destructive lies. That lie is at its most destructive when it is aimed at our very faith in Jesus Christ and sounds like this, "Is your living for Jesus really worth it? I know that he's supposed to come back and give you a perfect life and all that- but what about NOW? What about the next 50 years? Why live life his way now when it means passing up so much, and taking the hard way instead of the easy way, serving instead of being free?"

God's answer to that seductive question of the devil is our text for today. We live the way we do, because:

We Are Waiting For The Lord

- 1. With patience**
- 2. With perseverance**

Despite the fact that we wrestle with an instant gratification nature, we nevertheless recognize

patience as an good quality. Most parents see patience as a good thing, and wish they had more of it in dealing with their kids. News features hold up as noble examples the people who patiently endure lifelong diseases or disabilities, or people who labor long and hard for years to achieve their goals.

But James isn't talking about how nice it would be if we could all be more patient. Patience, as James and all of Scripture understand it, is a Spirit-worked gift in the hearts and lives of believers. It is a by-product of faith in Jesus. It is a willingness to delay earthly gratification all the way until we die or Christ returns. It is a willingness to serving God and others, because we believe we have better and more lasting blessings from Jesus -- the best thing being eternal life with him in heaven one day. James therefore says in verse 8, **“Be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.”**

To encourage us, James directs us to the example of a farmer. When the farmer plants his seed, the ground may become bone dry with no sign of rain in sight. He doesn't give up and dig the seeds back up, if it doesn't rain right away. He is patient and waits for the early rains to help his seeds germinate. Later, when the seeds sprout and the plants start to mature, he waits for the later rains to ripen the grain. He doesn't pull up the stalks and feed them to his cattle to cut his losses if the plants start to wilt in the summer heat. He again is patient. He waits for the rain.

We Christians are waiting for something more sure than seasonal rains. We are anticipating Christ's return. Like the farmer, we would be foolish to get impatient and to act as if what we are living for will not happen. And yet, we have been foolish, haven't we? We have lived as if Christ were not coming back, and as if this life provided our only shot at fulfillment, happiness, and glory. We have lived as if doing whatever it takes to get what we want before we die is the way to live...not waiting for God to give us ultimate fulfillment, happiness, and glory in heaven while we serve him here.

When we think that way, we don't treat each other very well. We envy those who have what we want. We resent others for how they impose on our time and our lives and keep us from self-gratification. We tear down others because we are unhappy ourselves, because we place ourselves under the constant stress of having fulfillment in earthly terms RIGHT NOW instead of waiting for the perfect fulfillment of heaven!

James warns us about that in verse 9 when he says, **“Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!”** He reminds us that we do NOT have a right to have this kind of negative attitude toward others. He reminds us that it is a red flag, warning us of a serious spiritual problem. It is pointing out a lack of contentment and peace in God and his promises. It is pointing out a rotten attitude in our sinful nature which could lead to the destruction of our faith and ultimately to Christ's return as a terrifying day of judgment for us. James warns us to lead us to repentance and faith in Christ's forgiveness and renewed anticipation of his coming as worth waiting for.

Like farmers who invest their time and energy and income in a crop, we have invested our faith and our lives in Jesus Christ, expecting a harvest we call heaven. Jesus won't let us down. He came once to be our Savior. He WILL come again to deliver the life he has promised us. “So be patient”, James says. “Keep trusting in Jesus and living for Jesus.”

James says in verses 10: **“Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.** James directs us to the Old Testament prophets. We know a couple of things about Old Testament prophets. 1. They were always hand chosen and called by God to speak the word of God to people, and 2. They suffered for it. Take Elijah, for example. He had to either live in hiding or actually leave the country so that the king and queen would not kill him. They didn't like to hear about their sin from Elijah. Or take Jeremiah. He foretold the destruction of Jerusalem because the people had turned their back on the true God. The people of Jerusalem didn't want to hear that so they publicly ridiculed him. The authorities had him beaten and imprisoned several times, and once thrown into an abandoned well.

Most of the prophets faced opposition like that. Many of them, like Jeremiah, were ultimately murdered. They often got discouraged. But they did not give up their faith in God. And God blessed

their ministries in ways they may never have even dreamed of, like when we benefit from reading and applying their words today. James tells us to be encouraged by them. For we are like the prophets. We too have been called and chosen by God. Our very lives are also to be a message from God to the world. And living out that calling means suffering for us too, as we do the difficult, selfless things that Christ wants us to do, and as the devil and the world opposes what we Christians believe and stand for.

“Remember the prophets,” James encourages us. **“Consider what they went through, how they kept trusting God, how God blessed their work, and finally took them to heaven.”**

“And don’t forget someone like Job,” James adds in verse 11: **“You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about.”** Job didn’t understand what had happened in his life. He had been a faithful and devout believer in the true God. Why would God suddenly destroy his livelihood, allow all his children to die in a series of freak accidents, and then let Job himself become sick with an extremely painful and debilitating illness? Why would God allow Job’s wife and friends to offer advice that actually made Job feel worse about his situation? Job struggled with how hard it was to patiently trust God when it seemed like God had turned his back on him. But Job did not pitch his faith in God like it was a broken appliance that didn’t work anymore. He persevered and in the end the Lord restored his income, his health, and even gave him more children. James is making a simple point. There have been others who have also been at the end of their rope, wondering if trusting in God and doing things his way was remotely worth it. So remember that you’re not alone. Don’t forget the believers who went before you. Through their struggles, they kept on believing. They patiently waited for God to act. And God did not let them down. God will keep his promises to you. So keep on believing and living for him.”

For **“The Lord is full of compassion and mercy,”** James finally says. Those Old Testament believers were not always faithful. Jonah ran away from his call and then pouted when God put him back to work. But God didn’t lose his patience with Jonah. He, in fact, rescued him when he should have died and still used him to proclaim his saving Word to the Ninevites. God didn’t lose his patience with the prophet Elijah when Elijah quit when the going got tough. And he hasn’t lost his patience with us yet either, even when we have been Jonahs, going the opposite way of where God was pointing, and going about our work for God griping about what God expects of us; or when we have been Elijahs, saying, “I quit!” when doing God’s will called for sacrifices we just weren’t willing to endure anymore.

Come to think of it, isn’t the life of Jesus one long beautiful statement about the long-suffering, patient love of God for sinners? There is no such thing as “instant justification”, or “speedy salvation.” Jesus had to patiently invest 33 years of his life on earth -- under circumstances far more trying than we’ll ever have to endure- in order to live a full, perfect life of obedience for you and me. Every kind little deed, every pure thought, every “no!” he said to every temptation, day after day after day, was because he loved you, and was committed to giving you the only set of clothing that would get you in the door of heaven - his robe of righteousness. The agony of the cross he endured was also not an shortened version of hell. Jesus suffered every last bit of punishment that you and I deserved for our sins on the cross.

It’s therefore not just the life of heaven we live for and patiently wait for -- it’s him. It’s being with Jesus. Because that’s true love. Johnna Loia understands that. I remember seeing her picture in the paper a few years back. It showed her sitting there in her apartment crying. Her fiancé, U.S. Army soldier Brian Penisten, had been killed in Iraq. She was shown wearing a dog tag from Brian that simply reads “Brian loves Johnna.” They were to be married the week of his return. Johnna, with voice trembling, said in a telephone interview, “I told Brian I would be buried in these dog tags, and I would wait for him, even if it meant forever. That’s one promise I’m not going back on. I’ll wait for him forever.”

As children of God, who wear IN our hearts and not just over them, the pledge of God’s love for us in Jesus, how can we not be like Johnna? Let’s renew our pledge today to wait for Jesus. Let’s do it for love for him. Knowing that we will NOT have to wait for him forever, but that we WILL be with him forever. Amen.