

Sunday, 11 December 2016

Advent 3- Patience

## James 5:7-10

Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

James advises us to wait patiently as we wait for the coming of Christ. He mentions patience four times in these three verses we just read.

It has been said that patience is something we admire in the driver behind us, but not in the driver in front of us.

Patience is self-restraint in the face of aggravation. It is the opposite of anger when faced with difficulty. It is not losing your temper.

Patience is an essential part of mature Christian character. Patience is mentioned as one of the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22- "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." Patience is also mentioned as a characteristic of love in 1 Cor 13- "Love is patient; love is kind..." Over and over

again when the Bible describes the character of someone who is living a faithful life we read that patience is a part of their character.

God has been trying to teach his people patience for a very long time. Abraham and Sarah were told they would have a child in their old age. In their impatience, however, they try to make this vision come true with Sarah's servant, Hagar, which causes conflict after Sarah has the child God promised. Abraham was given a promise that his family would bring blessing to the whole world, but this plan moved slowly. It would take thousands of years, in fact.

Their decedents, the Hebrews, would have to be patient as they awaited release from slavery in Egypt. Then when they were released, they wandered for 40 years in the wilderness before they entered the Promised Land. They eventually were taken by the Babylonians into exile and learned patience as they longed to return. The people of Israel learned patience as they longed for the Messiah to come and save them. James mentions the prophets, who stood and spoke God's words to a community that didn't want to hear them and sometimes endured terrible persecution. The disciples of Jesus had to be patient as they awaited the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. Jesus' disciples continued to be hopeful and patient as they awaited the day when Jesus would come again. We read James say today, "Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord". The early Christian community would endure numerous hardships and persecutions. It is

patience that allowed the martyrs to endure to the end.

Over and over again in the stories of the Bible, and in descriptions of Christian character we see patience mentioned or implied. It is a characteristic that we are to develop as followers of Jesus. God wants to help us develop patience.

We learn patience in numerous ways. We might learn patience as a part of our job. If you are a carpenter, or a farmer, or a lab tech, you will probably be better at it if you know how to apply patience. James says, "The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near" (James 5:7-8).

I once read a story about a little girl who was part of a farming family. She was very excited to see the seeds she just planted start to grow. She would go out into the fields every day looking for green shoots. Day after day she would ask her father when the seeds would grow and her father just told her to be patient. One day she did see little shoots spring up out of the soil all over the field. She was very excited, but she grew impatient again as she watched the young plants. They didn't seem to grow at all. So one night she snuck out of bed and went through the field and pulled each plant up just a little to help it grow a bit quicker. Well, we know how that story ends. If you don't have patience, you won't be a very good farmer.

We need patience to learn certain skills. To learn a

musical instrument you need to spend a long time practicing. Without patience you'll give up. To learn a language you need to spend time memorizing vocabulary and repeating grammatical structures. It takes patience.

We are also taught patience as we endure circumstances that are beyond our control. The weather is out of our control. It requires patience to endure the cold day after day, week after week.

We can use ordinary circumstances to help us learn patience. Waiting in line at the grocery store or the coffee shop can be an opportunity to learn patience. James says,

“Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors!” (James 5:9).

Rather than grumble and complain and get snarky with the cashier (something we will be judged for), instead, use it as an opportunity to learn patience. Difficult people will also teach us patience. I often think that God gives us at least one difficult person in our lives to help us learn patience and kindness. Instead of grumbling against this person and casting judgement on them, learn patience. Use these circumstances as a gift from God to train your character in patience. We grow spiritually not only as we do religious stuff like reading our Bible, going to church, and spending time in prayer. These everyday circumstances are important opportunities for spiritual growth.

We can use difficult circumstances to teach us patience as well. Illness can be a powerful teacher of patience. I don't believe God causes suffering, but I do believe that God can bring good out of suffering. Patience can be a good fruit God brings out of difficult circumstances. Enduring suffering can teach us patience if we let it.

It is important that we develop patience because it is a part of being like Christ. Jesus was able to love those that were beating and torturing him on the cross partly because of his profound patience. God is very patient. He works slowly and incrementally throughout history. Even in my own life I'm amazed at God's patience to watch me take two steps forward and then three back. God's goal is transformation over a lifetime, not a moment. If we are to become more like Christ, then it is essential that we learn patience. If we learn patience then we will be able to stand against injustice and oppression. If we learn to be patient in the grocery store, and in learning an instrument, and with difficult people, then we will become stronger when it comes to dealing with the big things. We will be ready when God needs us to stand against some evil. If we are not patient in these small things, then we will not have the character to stand in these big things.

God is not finished with this world. He is working in history to bring about his promises. But we will have to be patient because this is on his time-line not ours. We might want all the jerks in our lives to be made into nice people, but God works over time. Small changes over a long period of time.

God is patient, but a time will come when God's world will become what He always wanted it to be.