

James 5:7-11

I'm not sure which of these is more difficult...trying to herd cats, or teaching a young child to wait patiently for Christmas. I think cat owners and parents would agree that both are pretty much impossible. Cat owners either have to learn patience or give up their cats, and parents often lose patience when teaching their youngsters to be patient. In certain occupations patience is a way of life. An impatient farmer is not going to make it in the business. Farmers have to wait for their crops to grow. They have to wait for the Lord to give both sunshine and rain. A baby doctor needs to have patience as well. If the baby is not ready to be born, he simply has to grab his cup of coffee and wait for nature to take its course.

In today's Epistle text James urges us to be patient as we wait for the coming of the Lord. Christmas will come in thirteen days, and nothing we do can make it come quicker. And as we wait for the Last Day to come, that day as well, will arrive when it arrives. We cannot cause God to change the date. We cannot speed up time. Jesus will come in the clouds of glory on the day God has determined and not one day sooner.

If patience is a virtue, it's one that is often lacking within the church, and is scarcely found at all in the world. In the church we wait for Christmas to come through the season of Advent...sort of. How many of you remember when the Christmas tree arrived in church on December 24th and not a day before? Back then Advent was Advent, not a Pre-Christmas season. Now-a-days you will hardly find a church that does not decorate well before Christmas. But we do wait to sing Christmas carols in church. We do wait to exchange Christmas greetings until December 24th. But in the world there is no waiting. Forget Advent; Christmas is happening now. In department stores Santa has arrived. Christmas music is played everywhere you go. Salvation Army bell ringers tell you "Merry Christmas!" as you drop a quarter in their bucket. The world has no patience. Who cares that December 25th is weeks away? Let's celebrate Christmas today!

It's ironic, however, that though the world is not at all patient when it comes to Christ's First Coming, it is extremely patient when it comes to His Second Coming. The people of the world hurry up and celebrate Christmas now, but they could wait forever for the Last Day to come. The world pays no attention at all to the words of James, "The Judge is standing at the door." They prepare for Christmas by shopping, decorating, and baking, but they do not prepare for the return of Christ by repenting of their sins.

We in the church are not of the world. We look for Jesus to come again. If you did not care in the least about the Day of Judgment, you would not be here today. We know our Judge is coming. We believe what James says, that He is standing at the door. And therefore we need to learn patience. When Jesus returns, every one of our problems will be over. The day Christ comes back to bring His Bride, the Church, to heaven with Him, every headache you have now, every bit of stress in your life now will vanish forever. Do you have a head cold? Do you worry about heart disease? Are you fighting cancer? When our Judge opens the door to usher us home, these diseases will leave our lives once and for all. Do you struggle with paying bills? Is your heart heavily burdened with the loss of a loved one? Do you endure sleepless nights because of mounting concerns within your family, within the world? In heaven all these troubles will disappear.

The challenge for us right now is to learn to be patient. We want heaven's peace now. We want to be rid of our disease now. We know our troubles will be over when Jesus returns; why can't we have a taste of that right now? Look at the farmer, James urges us. See how he waits patiently for his

harvest in the Fall of the year. He knows good things are coming. He trusts that the crops he has planted will bear abundant fruit in due time. So with us in the church. God has planted His Seed within you in your baptism. We hang on His words. We trust His promises. His Word will bear fruit within us. Our hope will not disappoint us. Good things are coming. Let us wait patiently on the Lord.

Now sometimes we are tempted to live in just the opposite way. To have too much patience. To fall into the other ditch--the one in which the people of this world live. Some people put off their Christmas shopping until the day before Christmas. They procrastinate. "I have plenty of time," they keep saying to themselves. But if the weather turns ugly that day and they cannot get to the store, or if they become sick with the flu and cannot get out, they waited with too much patience. There needs to be an urgency in our waiting. We need patience as we wait for Christ's return, but too much patience to the point that we put His Second Coming out of sight and out of mind, is the mark, not of a Christian, but of the unbelieving world.

James tells us, "Do not grumble against each other...the Judge is standing at the door." If the teenage children think their parents will not return for a few days, they may throw a drinking party with all their wild friends today. But if their parents could arrive at any time, they will be on their best behavior and keep the house in good order. And so with us. The Judge is coming...at any time. And so why do we grumble? Why do we hold grudges against fellow Christians? Why do we allow our sinful urges to go unchecked? We live like the world lives--as if God doesn't care how we live; as if He will not return as our Judge until a long, long time from now.

But friends, the Judge is standing at the door. Be patient and wait on His arrival, therefore, but on the other hand do not pretend that He really isn't there; that the Day of Judgment will never come. He is coming and so we must repent today. Do not hold on to your sins and save them for tomorrow. Jesus is coming. Repent of any sexual immorality in your life, and then stop doing it. Repent of being spiritually lazy, and then open your Bible more, come to Bible Class and learn, be more faithful in worship. Repent of your grumblings against each other, and then reconcile with them; forgive and make peace. If we knew Jesus' coming was a long way off, perhaps we could put off repenting. But He is at the door. It's time to get our house in order. It's time to leave our sinful ways behind.

The last word James writes in our text is that the Lord is "compassionate and merciful." All over the Muslim Book of Koran these words are said of Allah. "Allah," every chapter begins, "the compassionate and merciful." And yet, what did this Allah ever do to show he is merciful and compassionate? Jesus went to the cross for you. He suffered the punishment your sins deserve. He was patient as the false charges were read against Him. He was patient as the soldiers yelled, "Who is it that struck you!" He was patient as they pounded nails into His hands and feet. Jesus was patient because He was dying for you. He, your Judge, was being judged in your place. He faced your judgment. He went to hell for you. You, my friend, are forgiven. This is God's judgment..."Forgiven!" Yes, you and I are sinners. Yes, we deserve to be punished for our sins. But your Judge is compassionate and merciful. He saved you from the terrors of Judgment Day. He comes on that day not to punish you without mercy. He comes to receive you, to welcome you home. You, dear repentant sinner, through faith in Jesus today will stand with joy before Him tomorrow.

When Christmas finally comes, do little children run and hide in fear? No, they run to the living room. They have joy, excitement. The day has arrived! That will be you when the Last Day arrives. No running and hiding. No cringing in fear before the Judge of all the earth. He is your Savior!

Your Friend! The greatest Gift you have ever been given. You will not run from Him; you will run to Him. He is your forgiving Lord. He showed His compassion for you by His death on the cross, and in His mercy you have placed your trust.

Christmas is coming. It is right at the door. Be patient. Wait for it to come, but prepare now for it. The Last Day is coming too. Christ is standing at the door. Be patient. Wait for Him to come. But prepare now and every day with repentance and with joy. Jesus, who is compassionate and merciful, comes for you. Amen.