

Advent 3 / December 15, 2019

James 5:7

“Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.”

Do you like waiting? When you are looking for a checkout at the grocery store, do you search for the longest line to pull your cart into? When you have been put on hold, do you feel anger when someone finally answers your call and interrupts the recorded voice saying how important your call is to the company? Do you wish the elevator would get stuck between floors, so you could keep on listening to that wonderful music? No one likes to wait. We rush for the doors, as soon as the elevator stops on our floor. We pretend we can't count, so we can use the express line at the checkout. No one likes to wait, but we are probably the most impatient people in human history. When the Lord visited Abraham and Sarah, they killed a calf, butchered it and prepared a meal. How long does it take to do that? More time than it takes to order and wait for your delivery. We are so impatient that we pay in advance and track the progress of our order on our phone, so we already have the door opened when the delivery arrives. If a thousand years are like a day to the Lord, an hour in a waiting room is like a thousand years to us!

According to Galatians chapter 5 patience is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. In our text St. James uses farmers as examples of patience. He writes, “See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and late rains.” The seed doesn't germinate overnight and produce a harvest the next day. Even when the fields are ripe there still may be a long wait before the harvest, depending upon various factors in the environment. There is patience as a virtue and there is being patient, because you have no other choice. Sometimes we have no choice and just have to wait. When we are impatient we may honk the horn and yell at the people in front of us to ‘hurry up, or get out of the way.’ We may grind our teeth and mutter unkind things under our breath. There is a saying, ‘Good things come to those who wait.’ There are some things that are better if we wait? Wine aged a few years is generally better than a bottle straight out of the vat. It's a good idea to wait until you are absolutely sure before you marry someone. The waiting leading up to Christmas makes the opening of presents more exiting.

Do you like surprises? I guess it depends on what kind of surprise and how surprising it is. Not all surprises are good and when you get to a certain age and physical condition, surprises can be down-right dangerous! Surprise and patience work together at Christmas to provide the maximum benefit. We wait patiently so we can be surprised at Christmas. The surprise at Christmas is a foreshadowing of the surprise we will receive when Christ returns and makes all things new. It doesn't matter how old we are, we all like to peek and see what our presents might be. We get a little peek into the surprise God has in store at the return of Jesus, in the scriptures. The nature of creation will be changed. Isaiah says, “The wolf will lie down with the lamb.” In Revelation St. John was told, “...death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” We wait patiently to be surprised at Christmas. We wait patiently for a greater surprise when the Lord returns, fulfills the promise of Christmas and makes all things new!

What do you do to keep yourself occupied when you are waiting? If we are in an elevator even for a short time we look at the ceiling, or at the floor. These days almost everyone looks at their telephone to keep themselves busy and avoid eye contact, or conversation. It's like we are all palm readers! We check our email and text messages compulsively. We can play video or card games on the phone, to help the time pass away. Some people read books. I got half way through ‘Moby Dick’ while waiting for my car in the shop. I was almost at an exciting part when they

called me. Was I ever mad! Places where large groups of people wait, such as airports, have entertainment stations for kids and adults. When all else fails we can watch television with close captions as we wait in the departure lounge, wait for our flight to be called. It may be boring to wait, but eventually time passes and we are on our way.

What can we do to keep ourselves occupied while we are waiting for Christ to return? Looking at our cell phone isn't an option, unless we are reading the bible app. I guess that's alright. Actually that would be great, because we would be reading the word and the best way to keep ourselves occupied while waiting for the Lord, is to be in the word and to put His word into practice in our daily lives. In His word the Lord reminds us of His promise to return and to make all things new. In His word He promises to be with us always through His Spirit, so that we are always ready to be surprised by His second coming. We keep ourselves occupied by putting His word into practice and living according to the responsibilities He has given us and fulfilling them to the best of our ability. In the parable of the household, the householder entrusts each member of the house with certain responsibilities before He goes on a long journey. The day of His return will be a surprise. They wait to be surprised by fulfilling the responsibilities entrusted to them. When we live in the word and in the responsibilities the Lord has given us, we are always occupied. When we are in the word and occupied by the things of the Lord, His second coming will be a surprise, but it won't take us by surprise. In fact, we will be ready for the greatest surprise of all; the renewal He will give to all things and the blessing of resurrection to a new life that He will give to us and to all who believe.

Do you count the days before Christmas? In ten days the promise of this Christmas will be unwrapped. Only the Lord knows how many days until His second coming, when the promise of Christmas is made full in the blessing of universal peace, resurrection and the renewal of all things. Do you know what you will be getting on Christmas day? Did you peek? Maybe we know and we will have to feign surprise Christmas morning. Peeking takes away the tension of not knowing, but you still have to wait to open the gift and some of the fun is gone Christmas morning. So don't peek! Wait to be surprised! We may have an idea as to what we will receive on Christmas Day. But we really have no conception as to what we will receive on the great day of the Lord, except that it will be better than anything we can imagine. God gives us a glimpse in His word. It's alright to peek there! St. Paul writes, "No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him." Whatever we imagine about the day of the Lord, it will surprise us, because it will surpass our wildest dreams!

Do you look forward to Christmas? When Christmas is past, do you count the days until next Christmas? Only 364 to go starting Boxing Day! We may look forward to Christmas with mixed emotions. For some, it is a reminder of a past that is gone and cannot be retrieved. For others, it is a special day that they have spent many months thinking about and planning to celebrate. We may look forward to the day of Christ's return with a similar confusion of feelings. The simple fact that we don't know what it will be like and have nothing to compare it with, may make us hesitant to let go of the life we now have. When death approaches even the most steadfast believers hang on to this life as long as possible. How could it be otherwise? This is the only life we have experienced with our senses. And so like the last day of our lives in this world, the day of Jesus' return may be something we would like to keep in the indefinite future.

Regardless of what emotions the day of the Lord stirs in our hearts, we await its coming with steadfast faith. We know the Lord is coming. He promised to return and take us to be with Him. The Lord always keeps His promises! We know the Lord Jesus loves us. He has shown us the extent of His love, by spreading His arms wide on the cross to make atonement for human sin, so

that everyone who believes would have forgiveness and peace with His Father. We know the Lord is compassionate and merciful. He gave Jesus bear our burdens and share in our sorrows. We know that He has a good purpose, which He will bring to fulfilment in our lives. In the letter to the Romans St. Paul wrote, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." Whatever His ultimate purpose looks like when the wrappings come off the gift of faith at His return, we know it will be good beyond compare.

Whether it's Christmas Day or the return of the Lord, we take St. James words to heart, "Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord." We patiently wait by hearing His word, taking it to heart and putting it into practice. We wait patiently, by returning daily to the forgiveness promised in our baptism and received in the gift of Christ's body and blood. We wait by living in the Spirit, treating each other with kindness, patiently bearing one another's burdens, sharing our joys and sorrows as sisters and brothers in Christ, forgiving as we have been forgiven! We live in the Spirit of the Lord, by sharing with each other the gift of His love during the Advent and Christmas season and throughout the year. Whatever gifts we give and receive at Christmas, may they remind us of the gift of God's love in Jesus Christ and of the gift to come at His return in the renewal of heaven and earth as the home of righteousness; and our share in Christ's resurrection to a new and eternal life. The God of all patience, kindness and compassion keep us in His grace. In Jesus' Name. Amen