**December 11, 2022 James 5:7-10**

 ***Patience and Joy***

**Scripture:** James 5:7-10 NRSV

*(7)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. (8)You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. (9)Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! (10)As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.*

**Notes:**

1. Many of us are not people of ***patience***.
	1. The Advent candle color changes to ***pink*** representing that joy is coming.
	2. Can we have ***joy*** in the midst of ***patient*** suffering?
2. Patience means ***forbearance***.
	1. Patience is about ***actively*** living out faith.
	2. The farmer illustrates ***patiently*** ***waiting*** for the Lord.
	3. The farmer is confident in his ***waiting*** that he will reap the rewards of this crop.
3. We are called to be patient and ***stand*** ***firm***.
	1. Live ***actively*** ***engaged*** in the work of the kingdom,
	2. ***Actively*** ***seek*** the one who strengthens our hearts.
	3. ***Strengthen*** one another, and wait expectantly.
4. The prophets are an example of ***patience*** in the face of ***suffering***.
	1. ***Job’s*** faith didn’t mean his suffering disappeared.
	2. ***Daniel*** was thrown into the lions’ den.
	3. ***Elijah*** was pursued by the queen.
	4. ***Hosea*** endured an unfaithful wife.
	5. ***Jeremiah*** who was known as the weeping prophet.
5. The persecuted are ***blessed*** with the kingdom of heaven.
	1. ***Blessings*** are reserved for those who endured hardships.
	2. ***Joy*** is deep-seated happiness rooted in the Lord.
	3. When ***blessed*** by God, we experience the ***joy*** of the Lord.
6. Wait patiently, in ***joy***, that Christ is coming.
	1. ***Focus*** on the work before us.
	2. God has been ***faithful*** and will continue to be ***faithful***.
	3. Christ has ***come***, He is with us, and will ***come*** again.

**Script:**

Today in our reading we celebrate the Joy of Advent. I sat this week and wondered what truly brings me joy? Could it be success financially? Could it be success in my career? Could it be living a life that has no struggles or controversy? Could it be (and you fill in the blank)?

The truth be told, many struggle with depression during this time of year. Even more since the Covid pandemic. Struggling with their life and career choices. Struggling with financial hardships and physical struggles. Struggling with discord within their families, and many of these people are considered successful. Many are considered financially sound, many come from good families. So why can they not find joy?

When you look at your life do you consider yourself joyful? Do you look at the difficulties in your life as roadblocks that stop you in your tracks, or as obstacles that need to be overcome and resolved. Do you look at the financial woes of this world and wonder where your next meal is going to come from, or think of ways to work around the shortcomings.

Well in our sermon passage for today James helps with these doubts and fears. He tells us to be patient. He tells us to wait, he tells us that the Lord will be coming soon. He tells us not to grumble against each other, so that we may not be judged. He tells us the Judge is standing at the doors, waiting for the time… Join me as we share in the reading of James 5:7-10.

 (7)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. (8)You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. (9)Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! (10)As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. James 5:7-10 NRSV

Patience? Whenever Christians talk about patience, someone often declares, “Don’t pray for patience, or else God will give you situations to practice patience!” People say this earnestly because many of us are not people of patience. We like two-day shipping; We like high-speed internet; and we love some fast food. We do not like to wait. So when we are confronted with a passage about patience, we might want to skip over this text, especially when it talks about being patient in suffering, when it talks about not grumbling. How many of us have grumbled? We grumble while waiting in line for something. We grumble because it is taking a little too long on a stressful Monday morning?

If this doesn’t feel a bit convicting for most of us, this passage falls on the Sunday of Advent when we celebrate joy! Even the Advent candle color changes to pink to represent that suffering isn’t going to last and that joy is coming. It almost feels contradictory to have a passage about patience in suffering without grumbling against anybody, especially our brothers and sisters during the week when we are celebrating joy.

The question is before us: Can we have joy in the midst of patient suffering? We struggle with inconvenience in our fast-paced world, but what about when we are faced with true suffering? What about when the diagnosis is a fast-moving cancer. What about the suffering for the victims of violent crashes What about when there are famines and persecution, famines and persecution like what the early church faced? What about when we face pandemics and the loss of loved ones? Is there a way to be patient in the midst of that suffering? Is there space for joy, even there?

**Patience means more than endurance—it means forbearance.** We sometimes think of patience as passively waiting for something to happen, Passively waiting for something to end, but James is using action words to mean that patience is about actively living out faith while waiting for the Lord’s return. There is work to be done, even in the waiting. This is a consistent theme in the book of James, which is focused broadly on faith in action. James 2:14–26 is dedicated to the idea of deeds (or “works”) being connected with faith. James 2:26 says boldly that “faith without deeds is dead.” The farmer is the analogy James uses to illustrate what he means by patiently waiting for the Lord’s return.

Farmers are not passive, even when it looks like they are. They prepare compost for soil, which involves a lot of waiting, but at the right times and in the right amounts, elements must be added, and the compost must be turned so it doesn’t mold or grow weeds. They prepare the soil, which involves walking through fields looking for rocks, monitoring the levels of nitrogen and various other elements needed to grow specific crops well. They till the soil, adding manure and/or compost as needed. They plant the seeds in the right places. Some seeds need to be spread out, some need to be planted deep, and some need to be planted in mounds. They monitor their seeds. They sometimes have to thin the seedlings so the crop can grow. They wait for the rain to come. James is very specific when he says the farmer waits for the rain. He is specifically referring to the autumn and spring rains that crops in that environment relied on to grow. Between the seasons, there is work to be done. The crop the farmer is waiting for is a valuable crop. This isn’t just corn used to feed cows. The farmer is confident in his waiting that he will reap the rewards of this crop. The word James uses for “wait” is also the word for “expect.” The farmer expects a valuable crop to grow.

**We are called to be patient and stand firm as the Lord’s coming draws near.** Again, this is not a passive waiting; there is work to be done. In some ways, this builds on the first week of Advent, hope. We live as people who are already part of the kingdom of God as we wait for the return of Christ. We are actively engaged in the work of the kingdom, even as the kingdom hasn’t come in fulfillment. This is the already/not yet kingdom of God.

The words that have been translated as “stand firm” in the NIV are actually truer to the Greek meaning with the translation found in the NRSV of “strengthen your hearts.” This is an active statement, an exhortation to dig in our heels and prepare for the long, hard wait. Paul uses this phrase throughout the New Testament in relation to God, who strengthens hearts. Therefore, we actively seek the one who strengthens our hearts. The Lord’s coming is near! As we have talked about, Christ brought the kingdom already, and the kingdom is also still to be actualized. Therefore, we live in light of the knowledge that Christ has drawn near and continues to draw near.

Don’t grumble against your brothers and sisters. This statement corresponds with other New Testament passages that tell us we will be judged if we judge others. The Judge (Jesus) is at the door, we are not the judge. Our time spent waiting isn’t to be spent actively serving as the judge of other believers. There is too much work to be done in the already/not yet kingdom of God to spend our time grumbling about other believers. The phrase here means to complain or grumble because you don’t like the circumstances. Often, no one is excited about the circumstances when faced with suffering like the early church was. They faced famine and persecution. The community of faith is a needed place to be united, to strengthen one another, not to grumble and complain about one another. In the midst of suffering, we can unite and care for one another, We can strengthen one another, and wait expectantly or we can judge one another with a complaining attitude. There doesn’t seem to be room for both.

**We look to the prophets as an example of patience in the face of suffering.** The early church would have been familiar with the stories of the prophets who suffered yet waited for the Lord. Job is the primary example here. He endured suffering upon suffering. His friends and his wife encouraged him to turn away from God, yet he stood in expectation that the Lord was near. Job’s faith didn’t mean his suffering disappeared. It meant he was confident that he wasn’t alone in his suffering. The story of Job is ultimately a story about the compassion and mercy of God.

Although Job is the obvious example of the prophets’ sufferings, we can think of others who suffered yet endured. Daniel, who was thrown into the lions’ den. Elijah, who was pursued by the queen. Hosea, who endured an unfaithful wife. Jeremiah, who was known as the weeping prophet.These prophets, and others, illustrate that God is close. They preached “the day of the Lord” drawing near, even in the midst of suffering.

Verse 11 says “we count as blessed those who persevered.” There may be a bit of a connection with the Beatitudes here. In Matthew 5, we see that the persecuted are blessed with the kingdom of heaven. Blessing in the kingdom of God is rarely connected with material wealth or good things on earth. Blessings are reserved for those who have endured hardships. Is there a connection between being blessed and being joyful? Joy is more than happiness. It’s not an emotion; it’s a state of being. Joy in the biblical sense is a deep-seated happiness that is rooted in the Lord, not solely in circumstances. When we are blessed by God, like the prophets, we experience the joy of the Lord. This connects again with the already/not yet kingdom of God because our joy is in the knowledge that we aren’t alone in our waiting. Our waiting is not in vain. Christ has come, and Christ will return.

We are reminded once again that we are people of the already/not yet kingdom of God. We live actively as people of the kingdom of God even now. In the midst of suffering, in the midst of pain, we wait patiently, in joy, that Christ is coming to make all things right.

We don’t complain and grumble about those around us because we are focused on the work before us. We are faithful like the farmer to prepare the soil, to sow the seeds, and to await the rain in its season that will produce a valuable harvest.

We light the candle of joy this third week of Advent because there *is* joy, even here in the waiting. We are patient because we know God has been faithful in the past and will continue to be faithful in the future. We endure because we know we are not alone, even in the midst of suffering. Christ has come, Christ is with us, and Christ will come again.