

"Waiting Patiently"

James 5:7-11

September 30, 2018

19th Sunday after Pentecost

Do you know that there are only 88 days, 2 hours, 8 minutes, and 55 seconds left until Christmas? (At least there were when I was writing the sermon last Thursday evening.) You probably didn't. I wouldn't have ever known this except that my sister-in-law, Emily, had put a Christmas countdown device on her Facebook page. Needless to say, she loves Christmas. She absolutely cannot wait for Christmas to come around every year and she begins counting the days till Christmas far sooner than simply this past Thursday. It is hard for her to wait patiently for that day to come.

Waiting patiently for something important to come is neither enjoyable nor easy. However, sometimes it is necessary. This is especially true for us as Christians. Our Christian faith is a forward-looking faith. While it is based on events in the past, it is not focused on the past. Neither is our faith, while existing here in the present, focused on the present either. While we enjoy the present, we are not tied down to the present. Our faith, as Christians, is always looking forward.

As the Old Testament saints looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, so we His New Testaments saints, eagerly looking forward to His return when He will set everything right again and return creation to its perfect state which it had before the Fall into Sin. We learn from the past. We live in the present. But we wait eagerly the future to arrive. Therefore, James encourages us in our epistle for today to wait patiently for the most important event which is ever been waited on, namely, the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

However, waiting patiently are two things – wait and be patient – which we don't do well. We don't like to wait and, when we have to wait, we don't want to do it patiently. It doesn't seem to be within our sinful human nature to do either of those. Adam and Eve seemed to wait patiently on the Lord before the fall into sin. However, after the fall into sin, things changed and people no longer cared to wait.

After Adam and Eve had sinned, God promised to send a Savior, born from the seed of the woman, who would then take on Satan and his evil hordes and rescue mankind from Satan, from the sin he had introduced into the world, and from death and hell which were a result of sin. Shortly thereafter, Eve became pregnant, gave birth to a son, and said, "I have received a man, the Lord." Now, many translations will paraphrase this literal translation by saying she meant, "I have received a child with the help of the Lord," but the vocabulary and grammar of the Hebrew is clear. Eve, who had no concept of what it meant to wait, thought she had immediately given birth to the Divine Savior which God had just promised. Little did she or Adam know that not only was Cain not the promised Savior, but the real Savior would not come for thousands of years, long after they were dead and buried.

Modern man today has gotten even worse. We are not patient and don't want to wait for anything. We put food in our microwave ovens to cook in minutes what would've taken a much longer time than in a conventional oven. And then we stand there, looking at the food going around, and saying things such as, "I don't have all

minute.” We have TV remotes to quickly change the channels of our televisions as opposed to days gone by when we had to actually get up walk over to the TV and walk back. We shop for many things online because we don’t to wait and go shopping in real stores. We pay for Amazon Prime, so that we can get the stuff we just can’t wait for in two days or less. If we can’t get what we want, as fast as we want, we often are not interested. So, we complain or we simply give up.

Now, this may seem to be a mere character flaw which has no real serious repercussions. Waiting patiently may be a virtue, but not being willing to wait or to wait patiently is not a sin, is it? While it certainly not a sin to be impatient or not want to wait, it can certainly lead to sin.

As we Christians continue to wait for the Lord to return and set right all that is been made wrong through sin, it becomes more difficult by the day. Sin and evil continue to grow and flourish. There seems to be not a hint of hope that anything will change as we look at what’s going on in our world around us: shootings of various kinds, terrorist attacks across the world, the gridlock in our government, unethical behavior of those in institutions such as the church or government which are supposed to guard and keep ethical behavior in the first place.

Personally, within our own lives, we are tempted by sin and evil in an ever more alarming rate. There are seemingly more and more sexual temptations with regard to premarital sex, same-sex attraction, pornography, and so on. There are financial temptations to get what you can without regard to the ethical or legal issues involved. Their spiritual temptations to ignore the Word of God and neglect participation in Divine Service in pursuit of other more secular options. Although most of these temptations of been around for ages, what makes them even more difficult and powerful today is that society no longer is opposed to such behavior, but often actively supports such behavior.

How can we wait patiently for the return of our Savior Jesus Christ to make this world right again when we see this world collapsing around us? It is not difficult to become skeptical and to begin to doubt that anything is ever going to change. We may experience rejection and ridicule from the society around us. There may be criticism, even persecution, for daring to be critical of this evil age and proclaiming a future hope.

This may all get to us. We may give up the fight against the immorality of our culture and simply join in the sin that is popular. Various surveys have indicated that behavior by self-proclaimed Christians is no better than behavior of secular people. We may begin to doubt our faith or even give it up since nothing ever changes except to grow worse. We may no longer be waiting patiently. In fact, we may no longer even wait at all for the return of our Lord, preferring to focus our attention, our priorities, and our love on the things of this world. This is the wide path which Jesus says leads to destruction.

What reason is there to wait? Why not adapt a philosophy “eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we may die”? And even if we choose to wait, how can we possibly wait patiently? Why not demand things right now? James gives us three examples of people who waited and how it turned out for them.

First, James asks us to consider farmers and how they wait. They plow the fields, plant the seed, and cover it all up with dirt. As far as being able to see any proof of future gain, there is none. I remember, as a child of nine or ten, participating in a school-sponsored program in which we planted the seeds of flowers and vegetables. I had carrots. I planted them and every day I would go out and look to see if there were any carrots. Finally, after a month or so, I could wait no longer. I pulled up one of my plants and was the proud owner of a two inch long carrot. Experienced farmers and gardeners would never do such a thing. They know, like the example in James, that the rains would come, the fields would be watered, and the crop would grow. So they waited patiently

Second, James asks us to consider the prophets of old who faithfully spoke in the name of the Lord. Unlike farmers, the prophets of old never knew whether their message would produce a crop and grow in the hearts and lives of people. Yet they continued to proclaim the Word of the Lord, trusting in the power of the Word of the Lord, and waiting patiently for the Word of the Lord to come true. Even though some of them never saw the fulfillment of their prophecy, they nevertheless waited in faith.

Third, James asks us to remember one of the most patient man of all time: Job. Even though Job lost his children, his property, and all of his wealth, he waited patiently to be vindicated. He lived in a much more difficult situation than any of us will likely ever have. But the Lord kept him through this time of waiting and eventually rewarded him with more children, more property, and more wealth than he ever had before. Job waited in anticipation.

The point for us is quite clear. We can wait and wait patiently because our God is a God of promises. He may not always do things immediately (as Adam and Eve thought), but whatever promises He makes, He will most certainly keep. God does that with farmers. He does that with prophets. He did that with Job. He will do that for us.

God promised to send the Savior to rescue us from our sin, from his judgment against sin, and from death and hell which our sin deserves. He first made that promise, as I said before, to Adam and Eve at the beginning of time. People waited for thousands and thousands of years. But God did keep His promise. His Son, Jesus Christ, was born in Bethlehem to take our place under the law and wrath of God.

When Jesus arrived, He did not immediately resolve the problem of sin and salvation. He came to fulfill the Law of God for each of us. He came to bear our sins, face the wrath and punishment of God, and earn forgiveness for all. This took 33 years for Jesus to accomplish this when he died upon the cross at Golgotha.

When Jesus was dead and taken down from the cross, He did not immediately spring to life and conquer death and hell. Instead, He entered the tomb on Friday and remained dead for 3 days. Then, Jesus sprang back to life, exited the tomb, having conquered sin and one; having conquered death and one; and having conquered Satan and hell and one. It all took place, but it all took time.

And now God asks us to wait one more time. The Lord Jesus Christ will return to judge the world. This promise is just as certain as His promise to come the first time to save the world. The Lord Jesus Christ will restore our bodies to be as glorious as His body. This is as certain a promise as he made the first time to earn forgiveness for the

sin which it corrupted our bodies. He will come to bring us to be with Him in a perfect and sin free existence in heaven. This is as certain a promise as he made when he came the first time to redeem those who had forfeited a perfect and sin free existence by their sin.

And so we wait patiently. We know that we can do that because we know that that for which we wait is certain because the God who made the promise is certain. We can entrust our future into His hands and patiently wait because we know He will not fail us or forget us. When it seems that this is so, we remember that the Lord is only practicing that which he asks us to do. He is being patient. To the skeptics in the time of St. Peter, Peter writes words which are still applicable to us today. He writes, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." (2 Peter 3:9)

James encourages us to make strong or establish our hearts that we might not fear, doubt, or impatiently wait. How do we do that – make our hearts strong and firm? We go to the source of the promises on which we are patiently hoping and waiting: the Word of God. There we see can be reminded time and time again of God's promises in the past and their fulfillment, as well as God's promises for our future and how they will be fulfilled.

Having been called, saved, and promised the glorious inheritance, through God's grace and by the power of His Word, remain steadfast in your determination to wait and not give up. Like a farmer who plants his seed and then competently waits, know that the Lord is going to bring you a bumper crop when He comes again. So, wait expectantly.

Like the prophets of old, continue to proclaim His Word of Law for this evil and sinful world and Gospel for those who would hear God's word, repent, and wait with us. Don't change the message or refrain from speaking. But proclaim it boldly and openly, being sure that Christ is coming. So, wait confidently.

Like Job, do not focus on the pain and the loss which is only temporary and will be gone when the Lord comes again. The Lord will give to us so much more than anything we have lost here on this earth. So, we wait joyfully.

Jim Valvano was a very famous basketball coach at North Carolina State back in the 1980s. He contracted, cancer and fought it fiercely. The slogan which he used as he fought for his life and for deliverance from the disease and the pain and suffering which accompanied it was, "Don't give up! Don't ever give up!" He said that as he waited patiently for a cure to cancer – a cure which never came for him. We can see this phrase and applied something totally different. We wait patiently, despite the difficulty in believing in the Lord's return, the ill-treatment we receive from others as we wait, and the temptation to give up waiting. But we don't give up. We never give up. Because we wait for God's promises to once again be fulfilled and for us to receive what He has promised for all eternity. It will happen. Wait patiently. Amen