

### **3 Sunday of Advent, A**

One of the hardest things in life to do is waiting. If we are expecting something bad, we wish it would hurry up and happen so we could be done with it. If we are expecting something good, we wish that would hurry up and happen so we could enjoy it.

A classic example is a small child awaiting Christmas. To his eager and impatient mind, it seems that every hour is a day and every day is a week. Christmas is now less than two weeks away; but before it arrives, some of the kids will be asked many times, “How many days is it until Christmas?”

We who are older are enjoyably amused by the impatience of the young, but surely we know that they do not hold exclusive title to this trait of character. In our own categories of concern, none of us like to wait. And our adult impatience can be considerably less amusing than the eagerness of children. I have seen broken home, broken hearts, broken spirits, and even broken bodies that were the by-products of adult impatience.

We must learn to wait, whether we like it or not. Life, to a certain point, unfolds at its own pace; and some things simply cannot be hurried.

In our reading from the letter of James, we find this very pointed and practical advice: “Be patient, my brothers, until the coming of the Lord.” Then he proceeds to use the farmer as an example of what he means. A farmer who did nothing but wait would not be patient; he would be lazy. The ground has to be plowed; the seeds must be planted; and the weeds must be pulled. But once the farmer has done these things, he must let nature do her part. So, he waits for the rain to fall, waits, for the sun to shine, waits for the seed to germinate, the plant to grow, and the fruit to mature. Then he goes to work again and gathers the crop.

Working and waiting - that is what life is all about. Some things we work for; some things we wait for. To know and practice the difference is where patience comes in.

We need to apply this principle, first of all, to our own lives. In dealing with ourselves, the temptation is double. One is to be overly indulgent. The other is to be terribly impatient. Both are self-defeating. The man who indulges himself, and never seeks to correct his mistakes or strengthen his weaknesses, is like a farmer who never works. His life will be choked with weeds, and he will never produce a harvest of Christian character.

On the other hand, the man who is impatient with himself is like a farmer who plants a seed today and expects a crop tomorrow. Life doesn't work that way on the farm or in the human heart. Becoming a whole and healthy person requires working and waiting. Strength of character does not happen overnight. The scripture tells us that even "Jesus progressed steadily in wisdom and age and grace before God and man." Our Lord spent approximately thirty years in Nazareth and the carpenter's shop, before he became all that he was and went out to do all that he did. That took patience.

You perhaps have heard the brief but beautiful essay on life that is called "Desiderata." Part of it says this: "Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here." That sound like advice. Practice patience on yourself. Know when to work and when to wait.

Next, we should apply this same principle to other people. James says, "Do not grumble against one another, my brothers, lest you be condemned." Have you ever noticed that we tend to treat other people in accordance with the way we feel about our self? The man who is angry with himself will frequently take it out on his wife.

The mother who is unhappy with her own life will sometimes be overly indulgent and sometimes overly impatient with her children.

So, we start by applying the principle of patience to ourselves and move from there to apply it to those around it. A great Christian leader once said, “Be kind to all people, because everyone you meet is having a tough time.”

That is good advice, and we need to remind ourselves of it several times a day. The temptation is to become so absorbed in our own problems that we forget other people have problems too. And when that happens, we become so impatient that no one can live with us.

James says, “Steady your hearts.” That means get hold of yourself. Sure you have problems; everyone does. So, be patient with yourself and be patient with those around you.

Finally, we must learn to be patient with God. And to even say that sounds like sacrilege; but must be said, because we tend to get impatient with God. We look at our world and see the mess that it is in. We see people who have more than they need, while others starve. We see crime and corruption. We see war and violence. And we may not say it out loud, but we wonder: Why doesn’t God do something?

I think John the Baptist must have been feeling that when he sent his disciples to ask Jesus if he was really the Messiah. It is easy to see why he would wonder. There he was, in prison; and his only crime was telling the truth. If Jesus were truly the Messiah, then it was high time for injustice to end and righteousness to reign. But Jesus sent John this message: “The blind recover their sight cripples walk, the deaf hear, dead men are raised to life, and the poor have the good news preached to them.”

Brothers and Sisters, we need to remind ourselves, as Jesus reminded John, that God is at work in our world. He doesn’t work by our methods or by our timetable, but he is at work. And whether we can see it or not, it is a pretty safe bet that things

are unfolding according to his plan. Our part is to join in the work, do what we can, and leave the rest to him. James said it like this: “Be patient, my brothers, until the coming of the Lord.” **Amen.**