

# Sermon for Proper 21, Year B

## The Text: James 5:7-20

There is a saying that goes: 'Patience makes the fisherman.'

At the end of James' letter to the Christian church, he calls for us to be patient, but he doesn't point to being a fisherman as an example of patience. Instead he points to three examples which may take us a little by surprise.

Firstly, he points to the example of a farmer as a picture of patience.

Now, how patient farmers actually are is hard to tell. You may have your own ideas whether you consider them to be patient or not!

For instance, they rarely get perfect growing conditions or have everything go their way, and some don't mind sharing their frustration with anyone who'll listen. So, at first it seems James has selected a strange choice of occupation as a picture of patience.

Yet the farmer is a picture of a form of patience, which we may call endurance or steadfastness. They persist in their work and know that the land, when blessed by seasonal rain and sunshine, will produce its fruit. So, they patiently work, season by season, and year by year, anticipating a harvest.

Our own faith, as we wait for the coming of the Lord, needs the same patient and persistent work. This doesn't mean every season of our lives will produce wonderful results. Some seasons we'll want to forget. But we patiently keep gathering to listen to God speak to us, allowing the seed of his Spirit to be planted within our hearts.

Like a farmer getting rid of weeds, we keep confessing our sins and receive God's forgiveness. We keep on receiving his holy gifts of body and blood, which nourishes us, and we keep on encouraging each other in faith.

These things are the rain and sunshine and work we need for our fragile faith. By God's strength we can endure with hope and patience those tough seasons, and by God's grace we can rejoice in his good seasons where we are blessed with his peace and joy.

The next example of patience is the prophets of the past. Again, the type of patience they displayed is endurance in the face of difficulty and even persecution. Sadly, but perhaps not surprisingly, a lot of the persecution they received was from fellow believers in God.

For us, we can easily become disheartened or want to give up when we face conflicts and problems within the body of believers. Even Elijah crawled under a bush and wanted to die because he was so disheartened by the lack of faithful people living around him. In his time so many had abandoned the faithful practices commanded by God and were living just like everyone else. He wondered how effective his work was and why he should keep working.

We too may wonder. Many of our children and grandchildren give up and no longer worship regularly. We've seen many come and go in Sunday School and Confirmation. We wonder if our efforts were a waste of time.

Even as we gather faithfully with each other, we may start to wonder how few true believers there are when fellow members show un-Christian behaviour. They act like hypocrites – saying one thing with their lips through their worship but living a very different way to what they confess.

Some of them hurt us deeply and we want to avoid them by not coming to worship. We may also be tempted to judge them and sooner or later we may show our own arrogance and lack of patience in the way we treat each other.

James knew these struggles would come for the early believers and they're nothing new, which is why he gives us the example of the prophets who patiently endured all kinds of trials, conflicts, persecutions, and troubles for their faith, and for the sake of other people's faith.

The last example of patience is of Job.

Now I don't know about you, but he's not the first person in the bible I think of as patient! I mean, his speeches show a distinct lack of patience! However, his enduring patience does indeed shine through with his trust in the Lord, whom he knows is compassionate and gracious. He knows his Redeemer lives. He knows the goodness of the Lord and, even though he didn't expect the Lord to restore him so richly, his faith in the goodness and love of the Lord was justified in the end result.

When we go through pain, sickness, grief, or misery, our patience is also tested. We, or the people around us, may question the goodness of the Lord when we face such suffering. God can sometimes seem so silent to our prayers, tears, and laments. Yet James points us to Job as an example of faith we too can emulate when we suffer all kinds of trials and temptations.

Our problem these days is we're not very patient. We've been trained to expect instant results in almost every aspect of our life, and so characteristics such as endurance, and persistence, are seen as rare skills as we chop and change our loyalties, jobs, marriages, friendships, and even faith.

Unfortunately, our expectation of instant results doesn't help us much in our faith either. We expect instant answers or help from our Lord, and very quickly question his love and goodness if he doesn't help the way we expect him to within our time frames. But what our lack of patience identifies is our misplaced trust.

It works this way: if we're impatient, it shows we're demanding things should be done *our way* and in *our* time frame. Our impatience shows we want to control people or events. Our impatience reveals we desire to be a kind of god in those situations or with those people. We figure we alone should be trusted and obeyed, hence our harsh judgments and the way we want to punish all those who won't bow to our own plans and desires and dreams.

Therefore, you could say our *patience* shows we want God's will to be done, on earth, even with us, just as it is in heaven, but our *impatience* shows we want *our* will to be done instead.

The examples of patience – the faithful farmer, the prophets, and even Job - are examples of people who trust in the Lord to do things in his own gracious time and in his own wise ways. Their patience reveals their trust, even when their faith doesn't guarantee everything will go their way on this side of eternity.

Therefore, we're to patiently trust that God is with us always, according to his promise. We patiently trust he will receive us and all his faithful people into his kingdom, no matter what we experience in this earthly life. We patiently trust our Lord is gracious and compassionate, and he will restore us in body and soul to life eternal.

In the meantime, as we patiently endure all kinds of troubles, trials, and temptations, he calls us to care for each other through prayer, especially for those who are suffering or sick or being persecuted.

In good times and bad, God wants us to call on him in prayer. As we pray for each other, we strengthen our fellowship through our grace, patience, love, and compassion. As we pray for each other, we show our patient trust in our Lord who will hear and answer us for the sake of his own Son, who prays for us and with us.

Knowing our church approaches another Synod, and many are seeking an immediate answer to their questions and desires, it would serve us well to remember we listen, speak, and act knowing God's will is done in his own time. We're called to be patient and trust our Lord even if things don't go as we plan or pray for. We gather together ready to submit to his will revealed to us through his written word.

Our best response in times of uncertainty, trouble, conflict, or persecution, is patience and prayer. Even if we gather in joy and peace and unity, our best response is also one of prayer and praise.

So then, as patient and prayerful people, if we come across people who are judging or punishing others, James encourages us to confess our sins to one another, knowing the Lord is gracious and compassionate.

We know he forgives us for the sake of the obedience and suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ. All our times of impatience are forgiven and covered with the holy and precious blood of Jesus. As we forgive others who have shown a lack of patience with us, we can assure them of our own, and God's, forgiveness.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, as we see the day approaching, there is much to do, but we do it patiently and faithfully.

We'll face many trials and tribulations and may even be tempted to give up on our common faith. While we wait for the coming of our Lord, let's keep our eyes fixed on Christ – patiently trusting him and submitting to his time schedule.

So then, patience doesn't necessarily make the fisherman (although it can help), but patience is part of being a child of God as we trust him in all situations and persist in prayer, praise, confession, and forgiveness.

Keep on patiently trusting him, knowing he is gracious and compassionate. Keep on praying for each other, knowing God does indeed hear the prayers of his people. Keep on confessing your sins, knowing God forgives you for the sake of his own dear patient Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.