

The Rev. Charlie Holt

I've often heard people will tell me that they don't like to pray for patience, because patience will inevitably be required of them, and they don't like to have it. But patience is one of the most important fruit of the Holy Spirit, and an aspect of the character of God that keeps us submissive and humble about the will of God.

And advent is a season of patience. We are being encouraged to wait and to wait with joy and expectancy and faith and trust in the Lord and everything that we are doing is symbolically encouraging us to bear the fruit of patience. For example, we like these candles over here and we actually lit the wrong one today. I'm sorry.

It should have be the pink one here. Let's. We'll fix it real quick. Yes. The, this is, called God that Sunday. Actually. And we wait for the third Sunday of Advent. I'm not. I'm not, just making a little illustration here.

She was correct. Your daughter was correct. It was the pink one. It's called God at Sunday. And. And we work our way around this advent wreath with patience, actually. Oh. We just get to light one this week and then. Oh, now we're up to two. And now we're on the pink one. Finally we're on the pink one.

And then, then we do the fourth and finally get the center candle. Jesus has come. This is all about waiting for the coming of the Messiah, Emmanuel, God with us. And of course, the culture can't wait. Cannot, we had a person who was a member of our church, staff and like Mary, who was not raised Episcopalian and so he didn't know anything about the Advent Police.

But there are actually Advent Police who make sure that we do advent correctly. And outside of his office, he had put Merry Christmas and Christmas lights and was kind of signaling that he was celebrating Christmas all through the season of advent. And one of our members came and really chewed him out for not being a true Episcopalian. And to his credit, he went and pulled out his confirmation certificate and showed it to her and said, see, I'm an official Episcopalian.

She says, well, you're not behaving like one. You don't know anything about advent, which is all about waiting and not singing Christmas carols and being careful to, not announce the coming of the birth of the child prematurely. James challenges us to have patience and his letter he says be patient. Therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord, see how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it until it receives the early and late rains.

And he uses that illustration of the farmer as an example of patience. I loved a book by Stephen Covey which was called Principle Centered Leadership, where he talked about the difference between the law of the school and the law of the farm. In the law of the school, you can work a system and patiently and, cut corners.

But on the farm you cannot do that if it takes as long as it takes on the farm. I at the University of Florida, that blessed institution. All right. Yes, everybody. Yes. And then you do that right there. I, I was a very impatient student. I did not like sitting through class. And so one of the wonderful things about the university is that they would record many of the classes.

So you could always go to the, to the lab and watch a class that you missed. And so if you needed to, you could do that. And then, there were these people called the A-plus students, and they would go and they would go to the classes and they would take copious notes, and you could go to A-plus notes, store and buy the A-plus notes.

Students, outlines. And before an exam, you basically could skip all the classes, just get the A-plus notes and still make an A on the exam. And I hate to admit it, but I did do that sometimes. And what? What is that? That's the law of the school. You actually can get a college education, make very good grades and not learn anything at all.

And that's, that is the law of the school. And Stephen Covey says that's not the way a farm works. You can't cut corners like that. You have to till the ground at the right time. And there's no way, to not plan a crop without making the rows and doing all the work of tilling the ground.

And then you have to plant the seeds and do all of that work, and there's no corner cutting and planting the seeds. But then one of the aspects of being, a farmer is you have to do a lot of

waiting, and you're waiting on the Lord, actually, to provide the rains and the right timing and season and the sun to come out and all of the magical things that are happening below the ground in the way that God has created the timing of creation to make those plants pop up out of the soil and, and grow.

And so the farmer is the one out of all the professions that understands patience. And what James is saying is we need to have patience like a farmer and waiting for the Lord. That this is this is an actually a good fruit of the Holy Spirit. And patience is on the list. Love, joy, peace. What's next? Patience.

Kindness. Goodness, faithfulness, gentleness. And then the last one, self-control, which is very much related to patience because there is a, a false patience, a patience that does not wait. And what? Let me give you a definition of patience. Patience is a hope that waits. And if we're going to talk about godly patience, it's a hope that waits in the Lord.

The psalmist that we just heard, chanted by our wonderful choir. What had the beginning line that it's happy. Are they that hope in the Lord? And so what godly patience is, is a hope that waits on the Lord. Now there is a false hope that the scriptures address. That is not patience. It's the hope that doesn't wait.

Romans eight Paul says, this hope that is seen is not hope. But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. So what is a hope that sees? Well, hope. Hope that is in the things that are seen are essentially putting your hope in the things of this world to satisfy the things that only God ultimately can resolve or fix or satisfy or help.

And so it's putting your hope in, in people or in a circumstance, or in an outcome, or in money or in fill in the blank. Admiral Jim Stockdale wrote a wonderful book called Love and War, and it was about when he was, shot down in the Vietnam War and, was a prisoner of war as one of the highest ranking, military officials in the P.O.W. camp.

He was very much a target for the Vietnamese, soldiers. And so love and war is written by him and his wife, and one chapter is his experience in the POW camp, and the other chapter is her

experience stateside. Praying for him and waiting for him and all the things that were going on during that time.

It's a it's a page turner. You will love this book if you if you want to read a great book, Love and War. And one of the things that Jim Stockdale says in the book is that there were those prisoners of war who didn't make it, and many of them died of a discouraged heart. It's the way that he put it.

They died of disappointment. And why was that? Because they were putting their hope in the things that were seen. And the example that he gives is actually the false hope of optimism that that places your hope in an outcome or a circumstance. And the optimists were the ones in the prisoner of war camp that were that would always say to themselves over and over again, well, we'll be out by Christmas, we're going to be out by Christmas.

And Jim Stockdale would say, we're not going to be out by Christmas. Don't trust in that. Why? Because Christmas would come and Christmas would go and they weren't out. And because they had placed their hope in being out by Christmas and put so much confidence in that when they were disappointed by the outcome, their heart broke. And essentially what a hope in the things that are seen is, is a form of idolatry.

It's a placing your hope in a false god and a God that will ultimately disappoint you and break your heart. And so, this has, impact on various things. I mean, impatience is caused by hope. And then in false things. And it forces us to get ahead of God's timing and to force things to happen. And this is actually where much of Christian ethics breaks down in our day, because we are in a very impatient society.

We want to open the Christmas presents before Christmas Day, don't we? As a kid, I always used to sneak in. I knew exactly where my mom put the Christmas presents. Did you know where they were? Yeah, I'm. I'm saying Nick did. Beth saying she didn't know, but Nick, said that he knew where they were. I, I knew where they were so obvious hiding place.

And I it was always a temptation this time of year to go and sneak in and and look and see whether I had gotten the presents that I was expecting. And then I had to lie on Christmas Day and act surprised.

And, you know, that's a silly thing that kids do, but it's symbolic of the unethical of our society. I think about sexual ethics. I, I try and encourage young couples and young adults don't unwrap the Christmas presents before Christmas Day. Wait until you're married, wait until you consummate on your wedding night. That's the way to do it.

And yet, our society is so impatient that our young people, force things prematurely and unfortunately and sadly deal with the consequences of that. Same thing with money where we, we want, all the problems solved now, and we're not willing to be patient to let values reset in the economy or to save money until we can afford things.

And so we overleveraged ourselves in every aspect of what we're doing in our day, where we're, we're bringing the future into the now prematurely. And we deal with the consequences of that unethical behavior. The Christian life is exactly the opposite. It's an ethical refusal to unwrap God's presence before their time. John the Baptist felt this tension in prison when he asked Jesus, are you the one who is to come?

Or should we be waiting for another? He was experiencing the suffering and the challenge of being in prison and and in his mind, God's economy should have been working a lot faster than it was for him. He wanted the Romans to be defeated and for the enemies of God to be thwarted. And all of the all of the promises to find their yes and his day.

He had gotten impatient with God's timing and started to take offense at the way of the Lord. The very one who he had prophesied was coming. So Jesus, is patient with John and says, go and tell John what you see, tells him about all the things that he's doing that were fulfillments of the prophecies of the Messiah.

The blind are seeing, the deaf are hearing, the lame are walking, the lepers are being cleansed. And, this is the day of the Messiah, John. It's just not meeting what your expectations. And

there's the problem, isn't it? My expectations. What I want, the way I want this to work out, the way I want it to look. James says be very careful about that, because it can lead to grumbling against the people around you.

And you can do tremendous damage to the relationships that you have in your life because of your mouth grumbling against others because they're not meeting your expectations. Have you ever connected, grumbling with being a judge? James? Does. He says, in his letter he says, do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged.

Behold, the judge is standing at the door. I had an interesting conversation with my wife about the difference between just basic complaining and grumbling. And, you know, the Bible actually has a lot of complaints in it. Think about Job or most of the Psalms. King David did a lot of lamenting and in one way that's healthy. There's a healthy complaining where we where we cry out to the Lord and we say, why my Jesus even did it from the cross.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why am I going through this? Why is this suffering taking so long? Why, why and you see these types of prayers, honest prayers all throughout the Bible and those actually are very godly. It's a good thing to pray an honest prayer to God, but where does it cross the line into ungodly grumbling and the shift?

It's very subtle, but it's when you stop wrestling with God and your complaining and start assuming that you are the God. That's the very subtle thing where your words cross the line. That's where Job had to get his attitude adjustment at the end of the book, because his line crossed from wrestling with God about the uncertainty and what he didn't understand, and asking good, good, godly questions to starting to judge others and to judge the Lord as not doing what he wanted and his will.

And so the Lord had to humble Job in his judgmental ism. Grumbling is a very damaging thing, and James is very concerned about our tongues. They are the rudder of the ship. They are the bridle of the horse. They are if let unfettered and uncontrolled can be a wildfire that can just burn everything. And it's in its path that can be incredibly destructive of your relationships.

And it is, at its root, a type of impatience that puts yourself as God and doesn't wait on the Lord to be in charge of that person or that outcome or that situation. And you take control of that for yourself. And what James is reminding us is to wait. Wait on the Lord, wait on his timing and wait on him.

So much of this is that serenity prayer, where we pray to accept what we cannot change. The farmer has to wait on the Lord's timing for the rain. And so we accept what we cannot change. Lord, and we pray that you would give us courage to be responsible, to change the things that we can change. You know, give me courage to plant the seeds and to till the soil and do those things, and give me the wisdom to know the difference.

So advent is, is a hope and a waiting that strengthens our hearts when we tap into that patience and wait on the Lord. James says, you will strengthen your heart. So he says, strengthen your heart, for the coming of the Lord is near. How do we do that? Well, we can look to the heroes of Scripture and even John the Baptist, in his moment of impatience.

Is reassured by the words of Jesus when he says, I am who you were expecting. And I've got this James. I've got this, John. And he commends John the Baptist as a great prophet. Prophets were often the ones that had great expectations about the promises and the judgments of the Lord, that God was going to solve the problems of the world.

But they also had to preach that word and believe that word and trust in God's timing to bring it about. So James encourages us to have the patient hope of the prophets and the way that we live in this advent season. Amen.