

Your best friend promises to come and visit. He doesn't say when, just "Expect me at any time." The days turn to years and still you're waiting. How long before you lose patience and start to worry or doubt, "Is he really?" How long before you lose patience and start to grumble, "He's never on time, always late." How long before you lose patience and simply forget?

Sounds like the church waiting for Jesus, doesn't it? Jesus is coming for us; we're told to expect him at any time. Looking out there at the signs of the end-times we might think, "He should be here by now." Looking in here we might think, "I can't wait any longer." Or with all that's going on out there and in here, we might simply forget that he's coming. But Jesus is coming. He could be here at any time. Maybe today. Or we could be in for a wait. With all that's going on out there and in here, how do we wait? James tells us: **"Wait Patiently for the Lord."**

Wait patiently for the Lord. What does it mean to wait patiently? To sit back in the comfy chair; take it easy and wait? The word James uses doesn't describe easy-going, comfy chair times. That word James uses means "long-suffering." James is talking about "floor-pacing, heart-racing, what's going on, what's wrong now, when's this mess going to end" times. James is writing for people who don't have time to wait patiently; who have too much going on to be patient; who have too much hurt to have to wait for Jesus. And James is telling us all how to slow down, lower our blood-pressure, ease our stress, lighten up and take a load of worry off our minds. How? Not by setting us in a hot tub. But by setting us in the Lord with some examples of patience and endurance.

First, James gives us the example of the farmer: **“See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.”** In Israel planting was done in the fall, and harvest was in the spring. Without the fall rains the ground would be as hard and dry as rock and the seeds wouldn’t germinate. Without the spring rains the plants wouldn’t mature and there would be no crop. The farmer and his family depended on those rains coming and coming at the right time, or else.

I don’t know how patient I would be if I needed rain this week to make my year. Every morning I’d be up early looking for some clouds. It wouldn’t be long before I’d be wondering, “What’s the wife going to think about me if our year goes bust? What about the mortgage and the bills? How will we feed the family?” I’m sure I’d be waiting, but I wouldn’t be patient. Instead I’d be worrying about all the things that could go wrong. And expecting that they would go wrong.

But is that what James said? - “See how the farmer expects his crop to burn up? See how he expects the rains to fail him?” No. James said, **“See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains.”** The farmer doesn’t hopelessly expect the worst; he lives in hope. He expects the rains to come. With the rains, he expects a good crop; and so he looks to the future with hope.

What’s the lesson? Don’t set your mind on today’s dry, hard life. Don’t set your mind on today’s stunted growth. Don’t set your minds on today’s empty-husk, hollow-heart living. We get to look forward with hope. Instead of thinking - “What more could go wrong

today? There's no way out of this mess. I don't see Jesus coming, at least not soon enough to do me any good." We get to be thinking like the farmer: "The rains are coming." "The Lord is near. He's on his way. And he will be here - not too late, not too small, not too weak - but Jesus will show at the right time, in the right way."

Sounds like prophet-talk, doesn't it? So James says, **"Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the lord."** James isn't talking about patience in a comfy chair; James is talking patience in the face of suffering. Isaiah, one of our great Christmas prophets, was sent to preach judgment to a hard-hearted, unbelieving people. Most people didn't like what he had to say and tradition says he was stuck in a hollow tree and sawn in half. Jeremiah, another of the great prophets pointing to Jesus, was sent to echo that message of judgment. Most people didn't like what he had to say. He was thrown into the dungeon, and tradition says that he was killed. Stephen, before he was stoned and killed, said this about the prophets - **"Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One."**

James says we can expect much the same - a world of evil.

But take the example of the prophets. The prophets suffered; but that didn't mean God had left them. The prophets didn't see Jesus coming in their life-time; but that didn't mean God didn't keep his promise to them. Even when it looked as if God were failing, God was faithful. Even when it looked as if God were forgetting, God was faithful. Yes, God was faithful and Isaiah's Prince of Peace was born. God was faithful and Jeremiah's Lord Our Righteousness came to save us. God was faithful and Stephen saw Jesus at the right hand of God and was then taken to be with Jesus.

What does that mean for us? We aren't waiting for someone who goes back on his word; we aren't waiting for someone who will leave us in the lurch. Our God is faithful. He is near. And he will come to deliver us. Just as he said through the prophets.

And then there's Job. James says, "**As you know, we consider those blessed those who have persevered. you have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.**" Did you notice? James doesn't say that Job was patient, but that Job persevered, that is, Job survived under a load of hurt and heartache. Job grumbled and complained; he even called God wrong. But Job didn't quit waiting. Pressed down under a load of heartache, he kept waiting for God to be faithful; pressed down under a load of hurt he kept waiting for God to come and deliver him. Job kept waiting.

But James' point isn't just "look what Job did." James' point is "look at the Lord." "**The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.**" When Job doubted God's goodness and fairness, when Job doubted God's faithfulness, when Job in his hurt and heartache called out against God, the Lord was full of compassion and mercy. He didn't strike Job down; he didn't turn on Job and give up on Job. But God saw Job's hurt and showed his love and delivered him. He healed Job's hurting heart with repentance and faith; he turned Job's poverty to riches; he filled Job's empty house with children. The Lord came to Job with a heart full of compassion and mercy.

Like Job, that's the kind of Lord I need. Not least of all because sometimes I wait like Job - angry, doubting, blaming, like I'm the judge. But I'm not the judge. James reminds us: "**The Judge is standing at the door.**" And when we're as guilty as we are, it's not a very good idea to be grumbling against the judge.

Thank God he has a heart of compassion and mercy. So instead of waiting for a fearful judgment we are waiting for a Savior. The baby born in Bethlehem is coming back as our Lord. The Lamb of God who died on Calvary's cross is coming back as our Shepherd. That means our Judge is the Prince of Peace who has already worked forgiveness for all our sins. Our Judge is the Lord Our Righteousness who has already covered us over with the rightness of God. Instead of waiting in fear, we get to wait with patient peace - our Lord is coming with compassion and mercy, to deliver and to bless.

So wait patiently for your Lord. Wait like the farmer looking to the future in hope. Wait like the prophets knowing your God is faithful. Wait knowing the example of Job that your Lord has a heart of compassion and mercy. Wait patiently because your Lord is coming. Amen.

December 10 & 11, 2022

SERVICE OF THE WORD

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... we might feel a frantic, frenzied rush for what?
Something that will soon be gone.

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we settle into a patient peace waiting for what?
Something that will last forever!

OPENING HYMN

"Hark the Glad Sound! The Savior Comes"

Hymn 313

Hark the glad sound! The Savior comes, the Savior promised long;
let ev'ry heart prepare a throne and ev'ry voice a song.

He comes the pris'ners to release, in Satan's bondage held;
the gates of brass before him burst, the iron fetters yield.

He comes the broken heart to bind, the bleeding soul to cure,
and with the treasures of his grace to enrich the humble poor.

Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace, your welcome shall proclaim,
and heav'n's eternal arches ring with your belovèd name.

INVOCATION

M: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship
of the Holy Spirit be with you.

C: **And also with you.**

+ CONFESSION OF SINS AND ABSOLUTION +

M: We have come into the presence of God, who created us to love and serve
him as his dear children. But we have disobeyed him and deserve only his
wrath and punishment. Therefore, let us confess our sins to him and plead
for his mercy.

C: **Merciful Father in heaven, I am altogether sinful from birth. In countless ways I have sinned against you and do not deserve to be called your child. But trusting in Jesus, my Savior, I pray: Have mercy on me according to your unfailing love. Cleanse me from my sin, and take away my guilt.**

M: God, our heavenly Father, has forgiven all your sins. By the perfect life and innocent death of our Lord Jesus Christ, he has removed your guilt forever. You are his own dear child. May God give you strength to live according to his will.

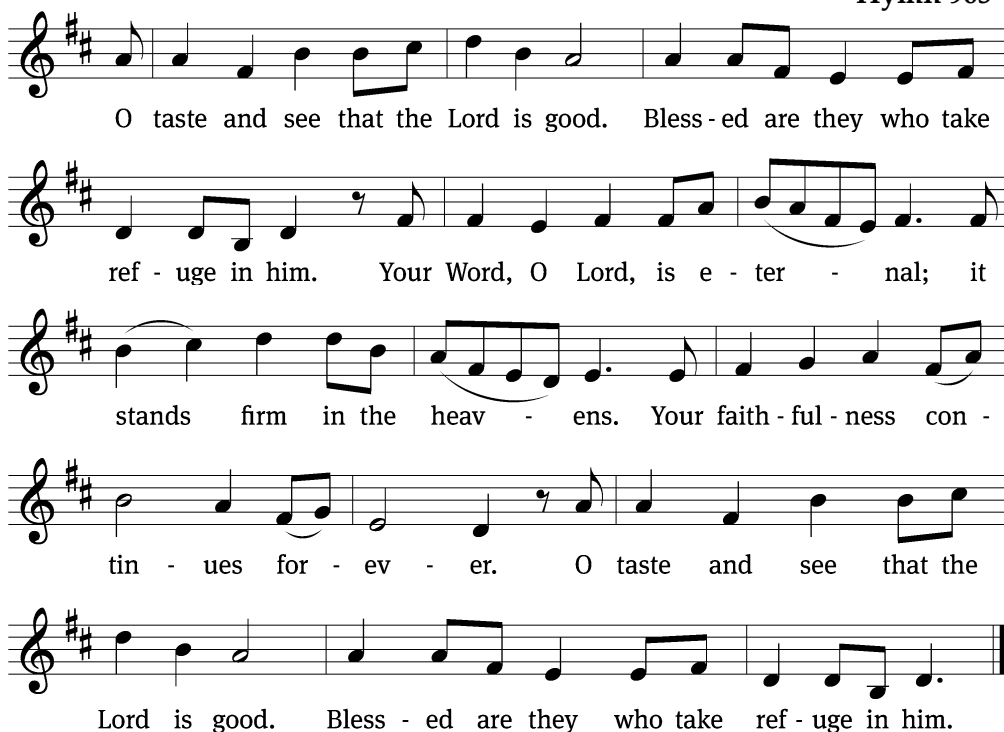
C: **Amen.**

+ PRAYER AND PRAISE +

M: In the peace of forgiveness, let us praise the Lord.

HYMN

"O Taste and See"
Hymn 965



O taste and see that the Lord is good. Bless - ed are they who take
ref - uge in him. Your Word, O Lord, is e - ter - nal; it
stands firm in the heav - ens. Your faith - ful - ness con -
tin - ues for - ev - er. O taste and see that the
Lord is good. Bless - ed are they who take ref - uge in him.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Hear our prayers, Lord Jesus Christ, and come with the good news of your mighty deliverance. Drive the darkness from our hearts, and fill us with your light; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 35

The desert and the parched land will be glad;
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.
Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom;
it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.
The glory of Lebanon will be given to it,
the splendor of Carmel and Sharon;
they will see the glory of the LORD,
the splendor of our God.

Strengthen the feeble hands,
steady the knees that give way;
say to those with fearful hearts,
“Be strong, do not fear;
your God will come,
he will come with vengeance;
with divine retribution
he will come to save you.”

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.
Then will the lame leap like a deer,
and the mute tongue shout for joy.
Water will gush forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert.

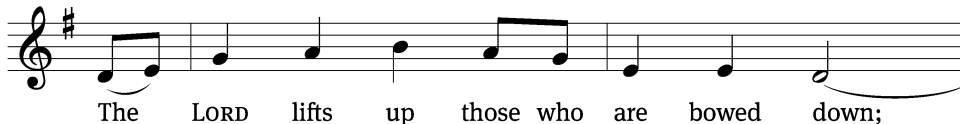
The burning sand will become a pool,
the thirsty ground bubbling springs.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM OF THE DAY

146A

Refrain



I will praise the LORD / all my life;
I will sing praise to my God as long / as I live.
Do not put your trust in / princes,
in human beings, who / cannot save.
Blessed are those whose help is the God of / Jacob,
whose hope is in the / LORD their God. *Refrain*

He upholds the cause of / the oppressed
and gives food to the / hungry.
The LORD sets / pris'ners free,
the LORD gives sight / to the blind.
The LORD reigns for- / ever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations. / Praise the LORD.

**Glory be to the Father and / to the Son
and to the Holy / Spirit,
as it was in the be- / ginning,
is now, and will be forever. / Amen. *Refrain***

SECOND READING

James 5:7–11

Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

HYMN

"Day by Day"
Hymn 803

Day by day, your mercies, Lord, attend me,
bringing comfort to my anxious soul.
Day by day, the blessings, Lord, you send me
draw me nearer to my heav'nly goal.
Love divine, beyond all mortal measure,
brings to naught the burdens of my quest;
Savior, lead me to the home I treasure,
where at last I'll find eternal rest.

Day by day, I know you will provide me
strength to serve and wisdom to obey;
I will seek your loving will to guide me
o'er the paths I struggle day by day.
I will fear no evil of the morrow,
I will trust in your enduring grace.
Savior, help me bear life's pain and sorrow
till in glory I behold your face.

Oh, what joy to know that you are near me
when my burdens grow too great to bear;
oh, what joy to know that you will hear me
when I come, O Lord, to you in prayer.
Day by day, no matter what betide me,
you will hold me ever in your hand.
Savior, with your presence here to guide me,
I will reach at last the promised land.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (Sung)

**Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! These words are written that we may believe
that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

GOSPEL

Matthew 11:2–11

When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”

Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”

As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written:

“ ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.’

Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY

"Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness"

Hymn 517

Praise the one who breaks the darkness with a liberating light;
praise the one who frees the pris'ners, turning blindness into sight.
Praise the one who preached the gospel, healing ev'ry dread disease,
calming storms and feeding thousands with the Father's word of peace.

Praise the one who blessed the children with a strong, yet gentle, word;
praise the one who drove out demons with the piercing, two-edged sword.
Praise the one who brings cool water to the desert's burning sand;
from this well comes living water, quenching thirst in ev'ry land.

Let us praise the Word incarnate, Christ, who suffered in our place;
Jesus died and rose victorious that we may know God by grace.
Let us sing for joy and gladness, seeing what our God has done;
let us praise the true Redeemer, praise the one who makes us one.

SERMON

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

M: Eternal Father, throughout the centuries you repeated and affirmed your promise to send the offspring of the woman to crush the serpent’s head. Through your prophets of old, you continually directed the eyes of your people to the advent of their Savior.

C: **We praise you, O Lord, for keeping your promise and sending your Son to destroy the works of the devil.**

M: As we prepare to celebrate the birth of our King, use your mighty Word to shatter our pride and to rouse us from spiritual slumber and apathy.

C: **Move us to take to heart the words of John: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”**

M: You sent your Son to redeem us from sin. Let this good news be our joy and strength. Use it to cheer the lonely, encourage the fearful, and give hope to the despairing. In these days before Christmas, spare us from the stress of deadlines and the frenzy of commercialism.

C: **Fill our lives with the message of your peace and the music of your grace.**

M: Direct our eyes not only to the manger but also to the skies, where we will see your Son coming again, not as a lowly child but as the Lord of lords.

C: **Lift up our hearts in joyful anticipation of that day.**

Special prayers and intercessions may follow.

M: Hear us, Lord, as we bring you our private petitions.

Silent prayer.

M: Come quickly, Lord Jesus, in your grace, in your power, and in your glory.

C: **Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

M: O Lord God, our heavenly Father, pour out the Holy Spirit on your faithful people. Keep us strong in your grace and truth, protect and comfort us in all temptation, and bestow on us your saving peace, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

BLESSING

M: Brothers and sisters, go in peace. Live in harmony with one another. Serve the Lord with gladness.

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

"Hark! A Thrilling Voice Is Sounding"

Hymn 318

Hark! A thrilling voice is sounding! "Christ is near," we hear it say.

"Cast away the works of darkness, all you children of the day."

See, the Lamb, so long expected, comes with pardon down from heav'n.

Let us haste, with tears of sorrow, one and all, to be forgiv'n;

So, when next he comes in glory and the world is wrapped in fear,
he will shield us with his mercy and with words of love draw near.

Honor, glory, might, dominion to the Father and the Son
with the everlasting Spirit while eternal ages run!

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