

*“The Lord Is Coming!”*

The beginning verse of the Lectionary New Testament Epistle Reading revealed its focus was on being patient. The author, James, stated in **verse 7**, *“Be patient, then, my friends, until the Lord comes. See how patient farmers are as they wait for their land to produce precious crops. They wait patiently for the autumn and spring rains.”*

Discussing the subject of patience, Rev. J. Curtis Goforth reported, “My mother would always say to me, ‘Good things come to those who wait.’”

Goforth continued, “Now I don’t remember this, but what I’m about to tell you is one of those things that I heard so many times growing up at Christmas that I believed it to be true whether it was or not, but it probably was true because I was a devilish little kid. This story happened way back on the week before Christmas in 1980 in a little yellow house off Bell Farm Rd east of Statesville. I was the ripe old age of two, and I was just about that age where I started to understand how things worked.” Goforth asked, “Did I mention that I was a devilish little kid?” Goforth said, “Well, it so happened that I was infatuated with those wrapped presents under the tree. I knew they were supposed to be opened, and I wanted to be the one to open them. Not so much because I wanted what was inside them though. I just wanted to unwrap them. To me, the best part was ripping off the bows and the paper, I couldn’t have cared less about what was inside the wrapping. Every time I got a chance, I’d sneak over to the tree and try to tear the bows off the presents. One day I made it around to eight different presents before getting caught. And, each time I got caught, I got my hand smacked for doing it. I was about that age where I was learning how things worked, and I was mechanically inclined enough to figure out how to work the storm door. So, when my mother went to take the trash to the street to be picked up, I wanted to go with her. But she told me to stay inside and not to come out of the door. So, I did what any two year old would have done, I started messing with the door handle. Now I wasn’t able to get it to open, but I was able to lock it to where my mother couldn’t get back in.” Goforth explained, “What I didn’t tell you was that my mother was only wearing her nightgown when she went to take the trash out to the street, and as she was doing that, not only did I lock her out, but she timed it just right to where she was on the receiving end of a special holiday present from a pigeon perched on the power line overhead!” Goforth shared, “Imagine the scene, if you will: my mother in the middle of cold December outside in nothing but her nightgown, locked out by her mischievous two year old son, pigeon poop in her hair, freezing to death – oh, and I almost forgot to tell you, she was five months pregnant too!”

Goforth confessed, “So naturally, my mother came to the door and tried to get in but couldn’t. She started saying all sorts of things to me that I couldn’t quite make out. Well, I did what any good son would do, I laughed at her. And, when I realized that she couldn’t get in, I immediately made a mad dash over to the Christmas tree and all those wrapped presents! I tore every bow off, and that was so much fun that I decided to then tear off all the paper from every one of those presents – oh, it was simply glorious.” Goforth disclosed, “But my mother didn’t see things that way. She eventually made her way to the neighbor’s house, in her nightgown, pregnant, in the middle of December, with a big white dollop of pigeon poop in her hair, and got a spare key that gave her access to the back door.” Goforth concluded, “I’ll just say that she was not nearly as happy as I had been about the situation. I got much more than my hand smacked that day. It was just so hard to wait to unwrap all those presents. But, I learned the hard way what the word ‘patience’ meant that day.” (“Sermon on James 5:7-10”, December 12, 2010 by Rev. J. Curtis Goforth)

The purported brother of Jesus, James, went on to connect patience with hope and the coming of the Lord – Jesus Christ in **verse 8**, *“You also must be patient. Keep your hopes high, for the day of the Lord’s coming is near.”* Now, the common understanding in our society of the meaning of the phrase, “the day of the Lord’s coming” is not usually portrayed as something hopeful. In fact, as I was preparing the reminder page for this Sunday, I was having a very difficult time finding any images related to our Scripture, which were portrayed as hopeful and positive. Many of them were very threatening or warnings of punishment. Instead of seeing the Second or Final Coming of Jesus as ominous and very troubling, let me suggest he is already present with us partially through the Holy Spirit, agape love, and the Church – the Body of Christ. He, thus, enables us to live the New Life in Christ with “high hopes” and patience, while we wait for God to bring about the complete revelation of the Fulfilled Kingdom with the end of Death, Corruption, and Despair. How are we to understand these “high hopes” related to patience and the coming of the Lord?

Dirk G. Lange asked, “Is James now proposing that we simply ‘hope’ for some future coming, eyes directed heavenward, as if we did not have to be concerned about this life? Definitely not!” Lange explained, “The key passage that eliminates a pie-in-the-sky hope (waiting for Jesus to return on the clouds of heaven and make everything ‘right’) is **“verse 9, ‘Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged.’”** Lange brought it into focus, “Our hope may actually be judged! What type of hope is James writing about, what type of hope will pass the judgment?” asked Lange.

Lange answered his question, **“The focus of this hope is not ourselves (whether we are gazing outwards or inwards) but the Lord and how the Lord wants us to live in this life.”**

Lange explained, “This perspective is doubly underlined in the verses of chapter 5 that introduce our pericope. The objects of worldly hope are squarely condemned. But here, it is not a matter of judging from personal prerogative or prejudice. It is a matter of justice for those less fortunate, for the workers, the ones without privilege.” Lange concluded, “Has the neighbor been ‘loved’ as much as self?” (Commentary on James 5:7-10 by Dirk G. Lange)

Yes, we are to be patient, as we live the life God calls us to live – the New Life in Jesus Christ – following Jesus’ example of manifesting our Divine Parent’s Agape – Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love toward and Non-Judgmental Acceptance of all persons! However, our Society and Culture encourages us to be fuzzy about all that agape love – loving our neighbor as ourselves. So, as Lange referred to the earlier verses in chapter 5, James pointedly warned against rejecting the ways of agape love – of, instead, giving into the temptation to be selfish and self-centered. It is remarkable and uncanny how some of the bad examples James wrote about continue to exist very prominently today. The author wrote in **verses 1-6, “And now, you rich people, listen to me! Weep and wail over the miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches have rotted away, and your clothes have been eaten by moths. Your gold and silver are covered with rust, and this rust will be a witness against you and will eat up your flesh like fire. You have piled up riches in these last days. You have not paid any wages to the men who work in your fields. Listen to their complaints! The cries of those who gather in your crops have reached the ears of God, the Lord Almighty. Your life here on earth has been full of luxury and pleasure. You have made yourselves fat for the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent people, and they do not resist you.”**

In case the reader of this epistle has any skepticism about the type of life we are to live prior to Jesus Christ Returning to Fulfill and Usher in the Fully Revealed Kingdom of God, James concluded our Scripture in **verse 10, “My friends, remember the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Take them as examples of patient endurance under suffering.”** The prophets, as James did earlier in chapter 5, often challenged the injustice and abusive living of the rich and powerful, who heaped oppression and hardship on the poor, the weak, and the powerless, with the result of significant suffering and the threat of danger for their own lives by the rich and powerful. In our Call To Worship today from the **Gospel of Luke, especially 1:51-53**, Mary, the then future mother of Jesus, sang her celebration and praises of how God **“has stretched out His Mighty Arm and scattered the proud with all their plans. He has brought down mighty kings from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away with empty hands.”**

As we are now quickly approaching our Celebration of the Birth of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, let us remember the testimony of the prophets and even of Jesus’ mother, Mary. Let us recommit ourselves to patiently living out the New Life in Jesus Christ with joy because he is already partially with us now and when he makes his Last Coming the Kingdom of God will be Totally Fulfilled and Revealed! Let us be agents of God’s Agape – Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love in the way we treat one another and all people. Let us express God’s Justice by seeking to lift up and protect those, who are mistreated, oppressed, in need, and without hope. **Thanks be to the “Mighty God” Who has done and will do great things for us! Amen.**