Sermon on 2 Peter 3: 8 – 14 – Patience Is His Virtue

“But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

They say patience is a virtue, one that many of us could use more of, especially this time of the year. “Lord give me patience and give it to me now” as the old tongue-in-cheek prayer goes. As children, we couldn’t wait to grow up. As adults, we often wonder where all the time went. What’s it all about? Where does it all lead? Why am I here? What’s my purpose in life? These are questions that many people struggle with. What about you?

In our text for today, Peter answers these questions by putting our lives in the perspective of time and eternity. Peter’s readers were dealing with scoffers who made fun of them for what they believed. “When is this Savior of yours coming again? How long are you going to have to wait?” People who make fun of us for what we believe are forgetting something. They’re forgetting about what God did to this world at the time of the flood and promises to do once more come Judgment Day, namely wipe out the wicked and save the righteous. So what’s he waiting for? He’s waiting, because Patience Is His Virtue. I. God’s patience leads to repentance and salvation. II. God’s salvation motivates holy and godly lives.

We can be thankful that patience is his virtue for the many times it hasn’t been ours. As children, each day leading up to Christmas seemed like a thousand years. As adults, it seems like it’s just the opposite. So many things to do and accomplish in such a short amount of time that our patience wears thin. Our patience wears thin when things don’t come as quickly as we want them to. Our patience wears thin with people who don’t move as fast as we want them to. Our patience wears thin with people who don’t seem to get it even though we explain it to them again and again. Our patience can only wear so thin before it snaps and we snap and say some pretty mean and nasty things to others. For the many times we haven’t been patient with others, we can be thankful that God continues to be patient with us. Why? Because Peter writes, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

We understand slowness. It often causes our lack of patience with others. It’s interesting. When we’re on the waiting end of things, people can’t move fast enough for us. But when we’re on the doing end of things, we get frustrated when people push us too fast and aren’t patient with us. And it’s not just our lack of patience with others that gets the best of us. How often haven’t we been impatient with God? When unemployment or underemployment goes on for months and years. When sicknesses and surgeries aren’t healed quick enough. When disease lingers or cancer returns. When we work so hard but we still can’t seem to make ends meet. When prayers seem to go unanswered or when prayers are answered but not in the way we wanted them answered. But who are we to get impatient with God? A man by the name of Job once did. In a short amount of time, his whole world came crashing down around him. He asked for his day in court to plead his case with God. God answered him saying, “will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!” When God reminded Job of who he was and what he had done for him, Job realized God’s grace and how undeserving of it he was. It would lead him to say, “I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.” May God’s undeserved love for sinners like you and me lead us to do the same! God blessed Job and used these trials to strengthen his faith. God restored Job’s health and gave him even more blessings than he had before. The psalmist David also realized God’s grace and how undeserving of it he was. He wrote, “when I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?”

What is man that you care for him? We see how much God cares for man in the ultimate Son of Man, Christ Jesus our Savior. During the season of Advent we not only focus on Christ’s first coming as the baby born in Bethlehem, we also focus on Christ’s second coming as judge of the living and the dead. That day is coming soon. On that day, everything will be laid bare, including the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts. In the book of Hebrews we are told, “nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” That’s why the season of Advent is a season of repentance as we prepare our hearts for the Lord. Repentance has that idea of turning from our sins and turning to God to confess those sins, looking to Jesus for full and free forgiveness of every single one of them.
Advent is all about patiently waiting for God’s promises to be fulfilled. The fulfillment of a promise first made to Adam and Eve thousands of years ago. They tried to hide what they had done from God not realizing that “nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight.” God was not happy with what they had done, and yet out of love for them, he promised to send a Savior to undo what they had done. By faith they waited patiently but never saw the fulfillment of God’s promise of the Savior. For Adam, that was 930 years here on earth. And you think your days drag on at times? God’s promise of the Savior was passed down from generation to generation through men like Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Devout believers who lived and died patiently waiting for God’s promise to be fulfilled, but never saw it. “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.” God’s promise of the Savior finally found its fulfillment in a lowly virgin named Mary. The Savior through whom all the world is blessed.

The Promised Savior who came to earth to live the perfect life we haven’t and couldn’t. Jesus was patient with everyone, even his disciples, who needed to be told some of the same things again and again. The same disciples who weren’t always patient with others. Asking Jesus if they could call down fire and brimstone on those cities who rejected him. Sending the children away because they thought Jesus was way too busy for noisy little distractions like them. But Jesus took the little children into his arms and blessed them saying, “let the little children come to me and do not hinder them for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” So that we could enter the kingdom of God, Jesus lovingly, willingly, and patiently walked the road to the cross to suffer and die to forgive our sins. Three days later he rose again from the grave to give us the gift of an eternity in heaven. Working through Word and Sacrament, he sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts to create and strengthen faith. Faith that believes that the best is yet to come. As Peter tells us in our text, “in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and new earth, the home of righteousness.” God gives us the strength and the patience we need to see our place and purpose in this life as we eagerly await the life to come.

And what is our place and purpose? Peter tells us, “you ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming...dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.” Yes, we are at peace with God through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May this peace enable us to live at peace with each other. Patience is his virtue. May it also be ours! The Apostle Paul writes, “let us make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification.” As a child, I can only imagine how often I put the patience of my parents to the test. I realize this because as a parent I see how often my patience is put to the test. The psalmist David writes, “remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you are good, O Lord.” May God’s goodness lead us to say, “I’m so thankful for God’s patience with me when it comes to my many sins and I pray that his forgiveness will strengthen my patience with others because I don’t know when my Lord is coming again.”

In our text Peter tells us, “the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.” So what does God want us to be doing until he comes again? Jesus tells us in the book of Matthew, “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” In a sense believers speed the coming of Judgment Day by sharing the message of the gospel with the world around us. Using the time, the talents, and the treasures God has given us to share the treasure of the gospel with the world around us. As we take the time to gather in God’s house around God’s Word and at his table to be strengthened in our faith and in our mission to share that faith with the world around us. Don’t let God’s patience lull you to sleep! Let it awaken you to opportunities to reach out and serve! Even though the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night, for the believer it’s also going to be like a loving father coming home from a lengthy business trip. Bursting through the door, taking his children up into his arms and hugging them. “Daddy, you’re home! We’ve been waiting so long. We’re so glad to see you!”

Amen.