

GOD IS PATIENT: FAITH IS LIVED OUT IN WAITING FOR THE LORD

Hear again the Word of the Lord:

*For still the vision (is) for (an) appointed time;
it causes to pant for its end – it will not lie.
If it lingers, wait for it; (it) comes and comes; (it) will not delay.*¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

The Wednesday Advent series for this year at Catalina Lutheran Church finds its center in hearing about God's patience. Each of these three Wednesdays will bring into our ears reminders of God's long-suffering on account of people. We will, it is prayed, learn of His forbearance from swiftly, according to our time, bringing His promises to completion. We shall learn that God's use of time, His acting in time, according to centuries and millennia, is for the benefit of those who have been, are, and will be called His holy ones, His saints. It is our hope that we all will learn that God is patient, and the Faith is lived out in waiting for the Lord.

Time is relative in the sense that One Who is outside it, God Who created it for the benefit of His creatures, sees all time at once. For we who are in time today, can read that those who are born today can expect average lifespans today around 76 years for men, and 81 years for women. We can compare those lifespans to 48 and 52 just a century ago, and determine that, over the past 100 years, expected lifespans in this nation have increased 30 years.² While that growth in longevity seems impressive,

¹ *Habakkuk 2:3*

² <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0104.pdf>; <http://kclibrary.lonestar.edu/decade10.html>

when compared to the first man, Adam, who lived 930 years,³ or his descendant, Noah, who lived 969 years,⁴ or Adam's many great-grandson, Moses, who died in the Faith after 120 years,⁵ to fall asleep in the Lord at eighty years old is to die a youth.

Through all those lifespans, whether as short as 48 or as long as 969, God is patient and the Faith was, and can be, lived out in waiting for the Lord. It seems reasonable that one who has to wait almost a thousand years to meet his Maker would need quite a bit more patience than one who need only a half-century. That speaks of patience from the human perspective, of course. But, from God's perspective, He who can see all time at once, your life before it has even begun, and all your trespasses against Him in an eye-blink, patience is a great virtue. After all, He sees you in your sins before you were even conceived. He sees His need to send you a Savior before the original sin in you moved you to actual sin, perhaps before, and certainly after you departed your mother's womb. Consider God's patience on your behalf, a small part, for a few decades, of His enduring long-suffering for all mankind...

This is what God's patience cost Him, before He entered his forties. Most of us tonight would consider tragic the death of a man before age 41. Many of us here tonight have passed that age. We would even more think that such a life was cut short, hardly lived, had that man known that death was coming upon him throughout his whole short life, and that it was due to no fault or sin in Him.

³ *Genesis* 5:5.

⁴ *Genesis* 9:29.

⁵ *Deuteronomy* 34:7.

Oh, how He would have yearned, as He did in the Garden of Gethsemane, for deliverance from that death in a life cut short. You can barely imagine what it is for Him to live all His years, and the eternity before He was born, in the knowledge that He would have to actually die a bloody and horrible death – on account of your sins, my sins, and the sins of the whole world. Yet, He was patient in the Faith. That Faith He gives to declare sinners right with His Father. He patiently suffered unto death. In Christ Jesus, God is patient: for His Faith is lived out in waiting for the Lord.

It is that Man, the Man of God's promise, spoken repeatedly throughout human time and history, that the prophet Habakkuk declares tonight. It is the Faith of God, lived out unto death in the Person of Jesus, which pronounces you right before God, no matter how many earthly years you may have before you pass from this life to the full Presence of God.

Without God's Faith in you, you cannot live right before Him, now, or in eternity. It is God's Faith, lived in the perfect life of the Christ, granted to you by His Faith, that declares you in a perfect, sinless, and right relationship with our Father in heaven. That is just how this verse is interpreted by the Word of God:

*Behold, he who is puffed up is not upright in His soul;
but (the) Righteous Man in His Faith will live.⁶*

Those who are “puffed up,” are full of themselves. Their thoughts and desires are turned inward. They think of all things, and of their actions toward others,

⁶ Habakkuk 2:4.

“what’s in it for me.” They are we when we follow our old natures – self-centered, self-loving, self-serving.

Against that Old Man who is so full of himself, stands the New Man, he who is filled with Christ. The Righteous Man lives in His own Faith. He grants that Faith free, without price, to those who, in themselves, in no way deserve His faith and favor. (That reality is proclaimed before your pastor whenever he has taken the Lord’s gift of His Body and Blood to one of our members who has now lived more than 90 years. At the conclusion of the Lord’s Service in his home, he remembers and recites that which he learned about seven decades ago: *Blessed Savior, Jesus Christ, Thou hast given Thyself to us in this holy Sacrament. Keep us in Thy faith and favor that we may live in Thee as Thou livest in us. May Thy Body and Blood preserve us in the True Faith to life everlasting.*)⁷

It is the Faith and Favor of Jesus the Christ which gives His Righteousness, His purity and sinless and complete keeping of the entire Word of God, to those who hear and believe His Word. The prophet recorded the Word of the Lord, in which He promised the fulfillment of the vision in its appointed time circa 630 BC while living in the Babylonian Empire. His words proclaim that “waiting on the Lord” is the essence of the Faith’s action in our lives. St. Peter reinforces that reality, of the Faith lived out in waiting on the Lord, when he says, the

⁷ *Lutheran Service Book*, 308.

Lord does not delay of the Promise, as some continue to count delay, but He (is) long-suffering for you all, not willing anyone to be destroyed but all to have room for repentance.⁸

It is God's long-suffering purpose to delay, in human understanding of time, the fulfillment of His Promises. You heard the lifespans of our forefathers in the Faith recounted earlier. Imagine being Adam, having to wait over nine hundred years to see the Promise of the Lord Face-to-Face. Adam would have lived nine centuries with the results of his sin, even though he was forgiven because he believed the Lord's Promise of the Son who would crush the head of His most evil foe – the Satan. For Adam, for Methuselah, for others whose lives approached one thousand mortal years, patience was a necessity.

And, it was a trial. Imagine living with a clear mind and sound body to see your many great grandchildren run from the Promise of God, to devise gods for themselves, attempting to make gods of themselves. When one has centuries to live under the effects of sin, even while one has been given the gift of the faith, one can surely become weary. Just think how impatient you have become with the Christmas jingles and ads that have been before you, in some retail locations since the end of October! Or, if you are anticipating the Nativity of our Lord, think how impatient you may be of seeing all this purple and rose, as you yearn for the white and gold of Christmas.

⁸ II Peter 2:9.

Now, think of God, and His patience for you. Find hope in the reality that He suffers for you, while He suffers with you in your impatience. He is using this time of Advent preparation and reflection to turn you to Him, and His Word, that you might see His gifts from above, handed down to you through simple means, to bring you forgiveness – from your sins of impatient waiting for Him to fulfill His promises to you, and from all your sins. God still says:

*For still the vision (is) for (an) appointed time;
it causes to pant for its end – it will not lie.
If it lingers, wait for it; (it) comes and comes; (it) will not delay.*⁹

The imagery of those words is powerful. It displays the reality that God's prophecies are like living beings, leaning forward, panting in expectation for the day they may be fulfilled. Even if it seems to you that the Lord is slow in revealing His visions recorded in scripture (why the ancient faithful had to wait centuries for the Christ to come after Habakkuk recorded these words) His word comes, and comes, and comes. In His sight it is already fulfilled, and in the Faith it has not delayed in you. God is patient: and His Faith is lived out you as you wait for the Lord.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Advent I, Wednesday

Psalm 14; Psalm 16; Psalm 90:1-6; Habakkuk 2:1-4; II Peter 3:8-9; John 3:31-36

December 5, 2012

Pastor Michael H. Mordhouse

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⁹ Habakkuk 2:3