

# ***Be Patient***

## ***Third Sunday in Advent (A)***

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# **Sunday, December 11, 2022**

*Indeed, we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.*

*In our journey of faith, we are often touched by the death of one of the saints, and particularly the long drawn-out illness and the suffering that has come to the family in particular as well as close friends. Perhaps this has shaken our faith and certainly reminded us that we are not just some happy club - where everything is sweet and light. The reality of the world in which we live is that there is incredible suffering both at a personal and a national level. But it is when we lose one of our own that we can no longer shut it away from ourselves. It is reality here and now.*

*In these circumstances there is a need for us to re-assess and if necessary, realign our faith to cope with what is happening. Our faith is tested by the circumstances, and it is natural for us to ask questions of God, particularly in the whole unfairness of the situation. It seems as if God isn't playing by the rules. There is no doubt that John in prison was feeling the same way - When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"*

*Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another? - This was the man who had said to John and Andrew - Behold the Lamb of God! - Here is the messenger who came to prepare the way - the new Elijah - greatest of the prophets finding his faith shaken to its very core. Doubting the message, he had been given by God. Did I get it wrong?*

*This is the essence of faith - not a vague assurance in the good times but finding God when things seem to go wrong -- horribly wrong. But it is finding God in these times that is our assurance that our faith is real, and perhaps this is the total purpose of the testing.*

*Jesus answer to John was not to say here is the answer - He said to John's disciples - "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them." If you like find God in what is happening around you. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. You have heard and seen!*

*Don't look for God in the suffering but in the endurance. When a friend spoke after the death of Margaret, she said - "Some people teach you how to live, Margie showed us how to die with courage and dignity" And that is where we find God. Not looking at the evil, but at what evil cannot destroy. And we are to look at where God is acting and active - in the good places - Where we find mercy and compassion. These are the characteristics of the future Kingdom as described by Isaiah. It is these things that we glimpse in this present world, but James warns us to be patient and he says 'look at*

the farmer for the example.' Our Crops are to point us in the right direction - They are our guides for they show us that things take time. Let each crop remind us of that need to be patient.

It is a mistake to only see Advent in terms of the forerunner to Christmas. Advent is about the waiting not to open presents but the fulfilment of the Kingdom that is promised. It is about looking beyond the evil and suffering in the world to find God ready to come and change things. The true sense of Advent is looking for the kingdom to come as we pray each service.

So what do we do as we wait?

Isaiah suggests - *Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees; Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God.'* This is not self-indulgent, but is shaped in terms of the other. Our faith is to be put into action in the sense that we have a responsibility to help others, who are finding faith difficult, those who are struggling because of their circumstances. And this is a natural process for all who are serious about faith. For it is in the struggle that we understand what it is that we believe.

Each death of one of our members give us as a congregation and as a ministry unit, a new challenge in our faith. We are called to encourage each other to find God in the hardship - To see God in the midst of the evil. This is not only important in that we are able to find him in action, but that this gives us a glimpse of what it is that we are waiting for - The kingdom that is to come. Like streams in the desert or a safe highway.

Isaiah has us looking forward to the time, when we suffer evil no more, but while we are enduring it, let us encourage each other to see God in action. John in prison shows that even the strongest of believers can have doubt when we lose track of God in action. For the other promise is that in the last days evil will seem to triumph before God brings these things to a close.

Let us - you and I develop the habit of looking out for God in action even in the midst of the greatest of evil, and as we glimpse the Kingdom let us earnestly pray - Maranatha - Come Lord Jesus. **AMEN**