

Second Sunday of Advent
December 10, 2023
Patient and Forever Present with Us!
2 Peter 3:8-14

There comes a time in our relationships with other people that we often realize *they are exaggerating*. Like the song by *The Proclaimers*, “I’m Gonna Be”, claims “I would walk 500 miles and I would walk 500 more just to be the man who walks 1,000 miles to fall down at your door!” Or, one of my students this week in religion saying, “Pastor I have been waiting three years to tell you this!!!” Never mind that she has only known me for about 5 months. And, the people who claim they work 24/7 or have told you a million times not to do something, or they’re so hungry they could eat a horse. If this is all the same person at the same time, I think we can all agree *they are exaggerating*.

Oh, we laugh it off, we raise our eyebrows, and most of the time we just take everything they say with a grain of salt...

I am one of those people who exaggerate, just ask Marcy. I usually see the good and not the bad, I am eternally optimistic in dire situations or just plain find a way to not let the bad overshadow the good. So I can jive with the exaggeration crowd and even understand them. And I believe that it is largely driven, for me personally, by lessons just like today in our epistle.

Peter is a part of a very interesting trifecta of authors that are working together over the period of approximately 20 years. All are writing to displaced, persecuted, Jewish Christians living in new communities with new jobs to support their families and opposition to their presence everywhere they went.

The Jews didn’t want them and persecuted them. The Greeks and the Romans? Well, they just didn’t trust them or welcome them.

Hebrews was written to encourage them in their newfound faith in Christ and warn them to never return to the works righteousness of Judaism from whence they came. James and Peter encouraged them to realize and live out their Christian identity as the believers in Christ they are now!

It’s kind of like when you first join the military. You swear in as a soldier, sailor, airman, coast guard, or marine, but you don’t get your uniform right away when they

receive you at the training base. First, you must be fully inoculated, head shaved, and go through all the administrative paperwork confirming your arrival and official presence. After a few days of waiting around, the Drill Sergeants finally come to get you, and it's a sprint to the uniform supply depot. You get every article of uniform clothing you will need for service in the military, and you finally feel like a real soldier, sailor, coast guard, airman or marine. But you just got the uniform. You haven't been trained yet and can't officially do anything for the branch you are serving in.

So, they tell you...you're a soldier, sailor, coastguard, airman, or marine; but now were going to teach you what wearing the uniform means and how an actual member of the military, which you already are, conducts themselves.

That's exactly how the Christian faith works, according to James and Peter. You are a Christian and now we are going to teach you what that looks like and how you will conduct yourself. When they show us the miracle of what Christian living looks like it feels like an exaggeration of epic proportions when compared to our former life. All that God does through us, with us, and to us is good, and what we were before faith in Christ was anything but GOOD. Everything God puts His hand directly upon is made good - His creation, the universe, us - through Baptism, absolution, and communion. Everything He touches and everything He does directly to us is always good.

Then God continues to inspire us to goodness through His Holy Spirit. The charity we give, the help that we offer, and the caring and loving shoulder to cry on, which the Holy Spirit enables us to do outside of our sinful nature, is good, too.

No doubt that sin is bad, *BUT* God forgives sin. No doubt the consequence of sin remains, *BUT* God takes that consequence and works all things for good! No matter what the devil may dare, God anticipates his every move and even uses that for good! As Romans 8:28 could not make clearer for our comfort today, "...we know that for those who love God all things work together for good,^[a] for those who are called according to his purpose."

So, what is God's good purpose in waiting thousands of years for Jesus to return, maybe sooner maybe later? God made it oh so clear in last week's First Sunday of Advent Gospel lesson, *NO ONE*, and I mean *NO ONE* knows when that is. What's good about that, you may be asking? Well, what's good about that, Peter shows us, is that God is patient with us. And since we are in Christ, we will be patient, too!

Years ago, at my former parish, Donna came to church with her two daughters. We connected immediately because she was a Nebraskan, just like Marcy and me.

She and her husband were faithful FBI agents in Jacksonville. But I noticed that her husband, Willie, never came to church with them and finally mustered up the gumption to ask about his absence from church.

“Oh, he won’t come to church pastor, and don’t bother asking him. It won’t do any good,” She said.

“No problem”, I replied. “But, if he ever changes his mind, he is always welcome.”

Well, he and Donna were quite the Nebraska Football fans. We couldn’t afford ESPN or even basic cable in those days, so they always graciously had us over for games, where I really got to know Willie well. But I always honored Donna’s wishes not to bring up church around him. We enjoyed getting together. Then, they started inviting the boys to come over and swim in the pool on days other than the game days, and we really got close to them. Over the years they became our closest friends outside the parish. Quite a years later, Willie showed up in church with Donna and his girls beaming at his presence. I was personally shocked because he never indicated any interest in coming to church nor alerted me that he would be there that day. So, I asked him, “What changed? Why did you decide to come now?”

Do you know what his answer was? He actually said, “I decided to come, because *you never asked me to!*”

I promise you, I am not exaggerating right now. Marcy, back me up on this!!!

He went on to explain that he had been really nervous about us coming over to watch Nebraska Football for the first-time years before. But he realized immediately that I was truly there to enjoy the game and not harass him about his absence from church. Then, over the years he realized that if I am like that as the pastor, the members must be nice, too. And he found that to be true when he started coming to church. No judging because he wasn’t a regular churchman, just welcoming people that loved everyone whether they loved Jesus or not.

That was when he realized what Jesus was really about. Jesus loves without any conditions on that love being reciprocated. Willie realized that there was truly nothing he could do that could make Jesus love him more and nothing he could do that

could make Jesus love him less. And His patience with Willie's reluctance knew no bounds. This is the very spirit of verse 9 in our epistle today.

I think about that all the time. That is God's patience with me! And I am grateful that God sees a thousand years like a day and a day like a thousand years. Because it took thousands of years for us to get here, and just like we waited for Willie, God was waiting for each and every one of us.

When we can experience the patience of Christ like that, then we can watch our animosity, love for the temporal and material, and desire to sin dissolve in the face of the Holy Life God has given us in Christ to live.

That's where our focus needs to be in this season of the Advent.

You know verse 12 says that explicitly. The ESV committee translated it the "Coming" of our Lord, but it is really the "Advent" of our Lord, using the original language of the church in Peter's day.

And I know, oh how I know, it feels like a thousand years for our littlest friends before we finally turn on the Christmas lights, set up the manger and lay the little porcelain Baby Jesus in it. But, in the meantime, we patiently wait for each candle to make its way up the stairs to the Christmas Candle. We invite our friends to experience the Gospel in our church and school recitals, rather than watch reruns of Scrooge at home. We know He is coming to take us home. It may be an exaggeration to the eyes of those who don't know Jesus, but to us, it's the arrival of our Savior who is patient and forever present with us!
AMEN.

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