

Hope for the World: Hope in the Unexciting (James 5:7-10)

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WATCH or LISTEN: www.fbcjc.org/sermon/hope-in-the-unexciting/

When I first began to think about the title of this sermon – “Hope in the Unexciting” – I wondered what does an “unexciting life” look like? Several different things came to mind, but the most obvious ones in my life were stacks of dirty dishes piled in the sink, boring and long expense reports that I have to fill out at work, endless loads of dirty laundry at home, and the simple act of driving back and forth to work – day, after day, after day.

But that’s not really what this morning’s theme is about. When we talk about “Hope in the Unexciting,” the reality is that we’re waiting... waiting for what God has in store for us; waiting for God to bring peace and justice into our lives. And – as people of faith – we have HOPE as we wait because we know that God is faithful. Even if our waiting is unexciting.

This isn’t a perfect illustration by any means, but this past week I had to drive a lot for work. On Thursday evening, I had to get myself from Cape Girardeau – in southeast MO – over to Rolla. There is no direct or EASY route from Cape to Rolla, but I still had to get there. So I started driving. It was boring. It required a lot of waiting. But as the miles passed and the hours ticked by, I was fueled by the hope I had: I would eventually get there. I knew what the outcome was going to be, and that gave me hope to continue the journey and do my best to enjoy the journey as I drove.

That’s kind of what we’re talking about this morning, as we continue this Advent season of anticipating what is to come in our spiritual lives. Let’s look at our first scripture passage together...

James 5:7-10

7 Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. 8 You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.

9 Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! 10 As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

From this passage, there are three things we will focus on today...

1. Be PATIENT. Will Willimon calls patience a “profoundly Christian, counter-cultural virtue.” This is reminder – as much as I hate to hear it – that I can’t speed things up the things of God. Instead of getting frustrated or giving up, we are to be patient... To keep the faith as

we wait. And it's important to remember what we're waiting for... For the "coming of the Lord." Most of us probably aren't focused on Jesus' return every day as those who lived in the 1st century were. But, I do think that ALL of us yearn for things to be better in this world. We have this built-in, God-installed sense that the way things are in this world are not the way that God intended for them to be. Evil. Greed. Selfishness. Disregard for others. Division.

James uses the familiar example of the farmer who waits patiently for something precious, something needed and valuable to happen – for the crops to grow. The farmer can't control when the rains come; the farmer must wait on the heavens to pour down the water that is needed to make the crops grow.

But even this example of the patient farmer who must wait for rain to fall is something that is relatively uncommon today. Just think about the big sod farm just across the river with their mammoth irrigation system that can provide needed water anytime it gets dry. With all of our mechanical and technological advancements, being patient is something we aren't accustomed to like those who lived before us where. We can turn on our sprinkler systems if our lawns start to brown, or set our Insta-Pot to have a meal ready as soon as we get home, or download a new song we want to hear immediately instead of having to buy the record in the store...

But we are not only called to be patient, we **MUST** be patient. Our commitment to follow and live for Jesus requires it. As we read about Jesus' life in the gospel stories, we see again and again how he wasn't content with how things were.

The key of being able to live in this way is found in verse 8: "STRENGTHEN YOUR HEARTS". Other versions direct us to "stand firm." The original Greek wording centers around a person's "heart and mind." The underlying focus is on the "seat (center) of our thought and emotion."

2. Do not GRUMBLE against one another... Isn't that so common for us to do, though? It's almost a common response in our society: When we get frustrated, when things aren't happening as quickly as we want, then we grumble; we complain.

And of course we aren't immune to this problem in church life, are we? If we get frustrated and impatient, we sometimes find ourselves grumbling at each other. I'm going to speak directly about the Pastor Search Process for moment. It's taking a long time, but that's just the way it's played out. None of us can change that now. We might be tempted to grumble about how long the process is taking or other aspects of the search, but I really want to focus on what's to come: When we do bring a candidate for the church to consider and vote on – hopefully not too far in the future, please don't let your impatience or frustration with the process lead you to give up hope.

Of course I can't say much about the search process due to confidentiality reasons, but I will say that those of us on the committee have seen God bring us together in a spirit of unity, despite our diversity of opinions and preferences. And we have a sense of HOPE that we can't wait to share more openly with everyone in the congregation as soon as we can.

This reminds me of a quote from Dirk G. Lange: "The hope that is proposed is a hope that is grounded in the Lord and on what the Lord desires. The focus of this hope is not ourselves but the Lord and how the Lord wants us to live in this life."

3. Remember "the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord." Throughout the Old Testament stories, the prophets – men and women who spoke God's truth – showed us one way that being patient can look like. We sometimes talk today about how we, as Christians, are discriminated against or oppressed. If you find yourself feeling that way, go back and read about the prophets like Jeremiah, Daniel, Elijah, and Elisha. The way they faithfully lived out their calling to LIVE and SPEAK the truth in the midst of evil and ungodliness is an example to us.

So not only are we warned to be patient, it's really the best way to live out our faith. And once again, our patience grows out of our commitment to STAND FIRM... to STRENGTHEN OUR HEARTS as we follow Jesus. That's the kind of faith that allows us to have HOPE, even when life is boring and unexciting at times.

To close, I invite you to allow these words from Psalm 146... words of hope and encouragement.

Psalms 146:5-10

5 Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, 6 who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; 7 who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; 8 the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous.

9 The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. 10 The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord!

Those words sum up how we are to live with Hope this season – even if it's in the unexciting and the uneventful things that we experience each day.

When our HOPE is focused on God, the God who has been with and for people like us for generation after generation, we are able to live with HOPE as we wait patiently.
