

SCREEN: Patience is a virtue

Patience is a virtue

I first heard this phrase as a kid, on a long summer car ride with my family.

Eight of us were crammed into our station wagon

when one of us whined to dad,

“Are we there yet?”

And my mom answered,

“Not yet. Be patient. Patience is a virtue.”

I didn't know exactly what that meant,

but her message was clear, *‘stop asking if we're there yet!’*

Later that summer I tried using the phrase to get out of doing my chores,

“I'll do them later mom. Just be patient.

Remember, patience is a virtue.”

My attempt at being clever didn't go over as I'd hoped.

I was sternly told that patience is not an excuse for laziness or procrastination.

SCREEN: It's The End of the World main screen

This is week two of our message series titled,

“It's The End of the World as We Know It...and I feel fine”

The title can sound scary, but that's not the intention.

In this series we're hearing the message that

no matter what is going on in the world or our lives,

we can feel fine because God is with us.

God has a plan for this world and the next.

Since the day that Jesus rose from the dead,

humanity has been living in the end times.

And with the pandemic, racial injustice and the election,

'the end times' sounds like the perfect description for 2020.

Our church year is also coming to an end -

Advent begins in two weeks.

In the parables of this series,

Jesus reminds us that his Kingdom is coming.

That message should fill us with some sense of urgency, impatience even to get ready.

The readings today told encourage us to do all we can to be prepared, which means putting our faith into practice every day.

Let's dive in.

Before I talk about the Gospel story we heard,

I want to discuss our second reading -

St. Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians.

Who were they?

A group of Christians located in Greece.

Paul preached the Gospel to them and they became disciples.

Now, that quick description can make it sound so easy, but it was anything but.

Paul converted both Jews and Gentiles but his preaching really angered the Jews there who refused to believe that Jesus was the messiah.

Paul was persecuted and hounded.

So were his converts - they were persecuted so badly that they started to have doubts about their faith.

They wanted Jesus to return and take them to heaven.

So Paul wrote these words to them:

SCREEN: But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness, for that day to overtake you like a thief.

For all of you are children of the light and children of the day.

We are not of the night or of darkness.

Therefore, let us not sleep as the rest do, but let us stay alert and sober. -1 Thes 5

To summarize, Paul encouraged them to remain patient but also to get ready.

Be patient and get ready.

I wonder if St. Paul had today's Gospel parable in mind

when he wrote to the Thessalonians?

Jesus told a story about a master who was going on a long journey and entrusted his possessions to his servants.

Their job was to keep the master's business going and make sure it remained profitable.

We heard that he gave each servant an amount of talents.

Now, we hear the word 'talent' and think of personal qualities or attributes.

But in Jesus's day a talent was the term for an amount of money.

One talent equaled 5000 days wages!

So for master in the story to give his servants 5 or 2 or even 1 talent was a sign of the great trust he had in them.

But there is no denying he it was also a great responsibility

And we heard that two servants proved up to the task - they doubled the amount and were rewarded.

Here's what the master said to each of them:

SCREEN: 'Well done, my good and faithful servant.

Since you were faithful in small matters,

I will give you great responsibilities.

Come, share your master's joy.'

But one servant failed the test.

He buried his talent in the ground.

The servant's excuse is that he did it out of fear

because he knew his master was demanding,

but his master had a different interpretation.

He called the servant wicked and lazy and ordered this punishment:

SCREEN: throw this useless servant into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.

Perhaps the servant thought he had plenty of time before

his master returned - and he was gone for a long time.

But the lazy servant had no intention of doing anything

other than burying his talent.

So this parable is really a cautionary tale - *a warning* - but it also offers a very clear choice to anyone who would follow Jesus, including us.

We can choose to live as good and faithful servants who are rewarded by God or we can live our lives like the wicked, lazy servant and get cast into the darkness.

SCREEN: blank red background

Of all of Jesus's parables, I doubt that today's is anyone's favorite - it's certainly not mine.

I much prefer the ones where Jesus tells us that God loves and forgives us over and over - that God seeks us out when we're lost and welcomes us back with open arms.

And that's all true.

God wants all his children with him always.

But as I said last week, God gave us free will.

And free will includes the freedom to walk away from his love by being lazy or hard-hearted or having misplaced priorities.

So how do we reconcile these two sides of God's personality: God who loves and God who judges?

And here's what I'd say:

God gives us our entire lives to choose his love.

He is infinitely patient when we make really poor choices and will always take us back.

But we should not abuse God's patience by procrastinating or being lazy.

There comes a point in life when we need to choose and then put our faith into practice every day by using the gifts and talents God gives us to build the Kingdom.

Have you ever seen the TV show called, Inside The Actor's Studio?

It ran on public television for years and was hosted by James Lipton, who died this past March.

He would interview famous actors of stage and screen.

And every show ended with Lipton asking his guest the same question:

SCREEN: what is the one thing you want to hear God say when you arrive at the pearly gates?

And Lipton sometimes got really amazing answers - even from celebrities who professed no religious beliefs.

Today I'll play James Lipton and ask you the question:

What is the one thing you want to hear God say when you arrive at the pearly gates?

In today's parable Jesus told us what our answer should be.

We want to hear God say the words,

Well done my good and faithful servant, come share your master's joy!

Don't bury your talents, don't hide them.

And don't squander or hoard them.

The talents God has given you (material and spiritual) are meant to be shared....now!

Not 'some day', not, 'when I have time', or 'if I feel like it'.

No. Now.

Because none of us knows what the future holds - for ourselves or the world.

Live your faith now knowing that when you live as God wants you to live, you will be blessed and rewarded like the good servants in today's Gospel.

And here's one way to make sure those words from God:

SCREEN: double your talents

Double your talents.

Talents are like people; they come in all stripes.

We all know individuals who are great in relating to people.

Others are great with organizing.

Some are able to lead and inspire others,

while some are more task-oriented.

Some people are blessed with musical or artistic skills (I'm not!),

while others are great with technology.

If you aren't sure what your talents are,
go to someone you know and trust and ask them,
'what talents do you see in me?'

Then, share your talents - double them to help Christ's Kingdom grow.
Every day you have opportunities to do this.

With Thanksgiving coming and Christmas right around the corner,
you will be presented with so many ways to put your faith into practice.

SCREEN: Families-Helping-Families screen

I'll mention again one perfect opportunity.

It's our Thanksgiving mission project called,
Families-Helping-Families.

Your generosity can help feed those who
otherwise would go without at Thanksgiving.

Due to the pandemic, the program looks different this year.

The organizations we support are asking that we only provide
turkeys and monetary donations.

Our program coordinators will purchase the turkeys with the funds you give
and any size donation is welcome.

You can write a check or donate through Faith Direct,
which is our online giving platform.

Check out the bulletin or website for all the details.

(or you can click on the link in the chat feature right now).

This week, take some time to reflect on Jesus's parable of the talents.

Read it over, pray about it and ask God to touch your mind and heart.

This week, let's recommit to serving Christ so that
his Kingdom will continue to grow. Amen. +