

Grounded In Hope

Wayne Waibel – 11/13/2022

In the closing verse of today's Gospel lesson, we hear Jesus lessening the blow of all the terrible things He describes in the preceding verses by promising our very souls will be ours. All we need do is endure.

As you well know – patience can be the single most elusive of all human qualities. We certainly have none of it as children, and many of us fail to learn it in the intervening years. And in the “on-demand” society we now live in – there's very little hope for future generations to just pick it up along the way.

It has become a thing that must be discovered – acknowledged – desired and finally – practiced. I wonder if someday we don't start seeing seminars and courses specifically aimed at learning the “Art of Patience.”

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Endurance is another word for patience. If you endure you will save your soul. All too often we find more excuses to roll out that would eliminate the need for or exercise of patience: “that car is going back to full delivered price next week, so now is the time to buy.” And it's a solid argument, but flawed thinking.

What Jesus was dealing with was a small group of disciples that were on the threshold of a mission far beyond anything they could imagine. They would be dealing with persecutions and betrayals. They'd be standing before kings and multitudes. And they would be doing all of this without Him.

The kinds of turbulence Christ was talking about were going to take place in the near term. Luke is a very calculated book of history. Although his narrative is careful to acknowledge the prophecies of Christ – his accounts were written after many of those same prophecies had already transpired. But to be sure – there were prophecies of Jesus that were meant for us in the twenty-first century as well.

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What we sorely lack in these postmodern times is the comfort of simplicity. Not only is just about everything available to us for the asking, those things that tend to matter most are not even on our radar. The worldview most folks have these days are fed to them through every conceivable venue – from a national sporting event – through a weekly television program – to a simple worship service.

It could be argued that our young people don't have a chance to grasp the elegance of a tidal pool – the wonder of a bird of prey as it catches a thermal and soars skyward without a single flap of its wings, or a truly dark night.

Theirs is a world of electronics, mind numbing media blitzes and understandably cautious social interaction. And somewhere along the line the value of life – human or otherwise – has fallen into obscurity.

Ask yourself – have we not seen wars and unrest? Are there not steady streams of imposters claiming to have the keys to the kingdom? Does the planet not issue forth torrents of immense destruction on a global scale? And still – the time is not yet.

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Isaiah teaches us that perhaps some memories are best lost, so that people can begin anew. This includes some of the ancient ways, practices and even doctrines.

As we embrace the universality of humankind, we let fall away those things that divide and isolate us. Scripture has always been a combination of history and prophecy. More and more we are beginning to fathom that some of the concepts beyond our understanding now, may very well serve an entirely different generation many years hence.

The Thessalonians were having a very difficult time living the faith so bravely sponsored by Paul and his contemporaries. Patience was in short supply with them as well. As a result, they were easily knocked off course when they discovered that anytime you give – there would be someone who tries to take advantage of that.

That's why as Jesus wrapped up His public ministry, He was so loving in His way of preparing the disciples and other followers for what was to come. He was specific and entirely frank about what would happen and the signs that preceded those eventualities. While there may have been a good deal of doom and gloom involved, there was also much hope and promise.

He told them they would be persecuted, but He also told them not to fret over preparations for what may lie ahead – He would put the words in their mouth that would not only contradict charges, but make the testimony impossible to resist.

Sometimes when I try to explain or expand on Scripture, it occurs to me that there is no substitute for the actual passage, and in that moment, I am reminded that,

"in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

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We've all heard the expression, "they have the patience of a saint." What that interpretation is to most of us is essentially endless patience. The kind of patience that outlasts arrogance - wrongful accusation - an impossible boss.

While I respect that view of patience, I think Jesus was talking about a much more active kind of patience that transcends the notion of simply outlasting someone or something. An endurance grounded in hope.

And here's the kicker to the kind of patience Jesus is talking about. It opens the door to understanding and tolerance along with endurance and forbearance. This kind of understanding results in benefits far beyond our ability to comprehend.

We hold some extraordinary capacities as children of God, and patience allows us to explore all of them. As we wait – we listen – we imagine – we contemplate – we reason. All of those seemingly quiet pursuits garner magnificent results.

The more in touch we are with our inner small voice, the better able we are to present ourselves to the wider world. We seek to participate in God's new creation not as a means of earning it, but as a way of responding to God's grace extended to us. We become a community.

And that community grows until all are members. So the wars and rumors of war continue, as do the imposters, and the ferocity of nature. But this community bears witness to the redemptive power of our Lord and His promise to us that our steadfastness and patient endurance grounded in hope - restores our soul. And we no longer tremble, but rejoice. For thus is the way of our Lord. Amen.