

Third Sunday of Advent, Epistle, Year A

GRUMBLE NO MORE

James 5:7-11

Third Sunday of Advent

Analysis by Bill White

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. 11 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.

DIAGNOSIS: From Suffering to Judgment

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Suffering Leads to Impatience Leads to Grumbling

Many to whom James is writing are looking forward to Jesus' future advent. In fact, they are very anxious and ready for Jesus to return soon, and very soon. Why? Because they are suffering, suffering because they are Christians. Thus they have grown impatient for Jesus to come and deliver them from their suffering. Can't you just hear them grumbling? "The coming of the Lord is supposed to be near! So where is he? What's taking him so long? How long must we suffer?"

James knows this kind of impatience may very well lead believers to not only grumble, but grumble against one another within the congregation. And James knows that grumbling against other suffering believers is not the way to be prepared for the advent of Jesus.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Faithless Grumbling

Those believers whose impatience moves them to grumble against one another have a deeper problem. Their impatient grumbling reveals their lack of faith. "If this Christian faith is really true, wouldn't Jesus have come back by now? You know, if Jesus really is God and if he really cared about us, he wouldn't let us suffer this long! Heck, he wouldn't let us suffer at all!!! Are we sure Jesus is really the Christ?"

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Faithless Grumbling Brings Judgment

Worse still, the Judge is standing at the doors (v. 9)! When Jesus does come will he find them hurling accusations at each other, as if the causes of suffering arose from within their own fellowship? Or will they heed James' advice about patience and suffering, and remember the words of Jesus, "Do not judge, and you will not be judged" (Luke 6:37)?

PROGNOSIS: Hope in Christ

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): The Lord Jesus Is Coming

James reminds his readers that Jesus has promised to come again, "... for the coming of the Lord is near" (v. 8b). When Jesus comes he will indeed judge the living and the dead. And all who believe in him will experience the full benefits of Christ's first coming: namely, Jesus has endured God's judgment and fulfilled the demands of God's law. By his own suffering, death

on the cross, glorious resurrection and ascension, Jesus has conquered the power of sin, death, and the devil for all who believe in him. Yes, Jesus will come and when he comes he will judge with compassion and mercy (v. 11).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Jesus Is Compassionate and Merciful to Us

But the advent of Jesus is not just a future event that will happen someday. Christ also comes to us in the present, coming into our lives through Word and sacrament. Fortunately, Jesus comes in his compassion and mercy to us impatient, grumbling Christians offering us a rich measure of true faith in exchange for our weak or misplaced faith. This is faith that assures us that we are forgiven for our past times of grumbling against God, and against others in the congregation. This is faith that empowers change; change from grumblers about each other to faithful witnesses to Christ.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): From Grumbling to Patiently Enduring Suffering

Hence, we who receive Christ's free gift of faith will have our hearts strengthened (v. 8) such that we will be empowered to practice patient endurance, even while suffering for our faith. With the patience of a wise farmer, able to endure with patience like the prophets, and with the endurance of Job, we will cling to faith in Jesus Christ believing that he will come at the right time according to God's plan. And, empowered by Christ, we grumble no more. Indeed, we are called blessed (v. 11)!