

Sunday, December 7, 2025

Sermon: "Wait, Brace, Let It Go"

James 5:7-10 NRSV

Where we're going in today's sermon: When the "Fasten Seatbelts" sign comes on you know you're in for a bumpy ride.

We don't like to wait. We check our phones when the line at the drive-thru slows down. We tap our feet when the internet takes more than five seconds to load. We complain when a package is marked "out for delivery" but hasn't arrived yet. We are a people trained by technology and culture to expect everything now - and maybe even faster.

But James has another word for us: "Be patient, therefore, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord." (James 5:7). It's a call to a deeper kind of waiting. It's not just passive delay, but active trust. He invites us to wait like a farmer, who knows something is growing even when sprouting crops have yet to emerge from the ground. To wait with eyes open, hands ready and hearts steady.

And James doesn't stop there. He tells us to brace for it. Strengthen your hearts. The Lord is near. Hard times may be coming. But so is the Judge, and He is just.

And finally, he advises us to let it go. Don't grumble against each other. You have enough baggage to carry without dragging around resentment or bitterness. Let God be God, and let go of what keeps you bound.

Wait for it. Brace for it. Let it go. It's not just advice, but a spiritual rhythm for living well when the world feels slow, heavy and uncertain.

James wants us to get through it, but he also wants us to grow through it.

"Wait for it" is a phrase you frequently hear. Sometimes, it's used for comic effect - a video clip plays out awkwardly, and just when you're about to scroll away, the screen flashes: "WAIT FOR IT ..."

Something surprising is coming. Something worth staying for. James borrows the image of a farmer, who plants in hope, labors in faith, and waits through sun and storm, trusting that the harvest will come.

You might think waiting is boring. In fact, patience can be exciting. Holy patience isn't passive. It isn't idly twiddling our thumbs in the waiting room of life, irritated that our "appointment with God" is running late. James wants us to wait like farmers wait: with hope, expectation, and most of all, purpose.

There's nothing more frustrating than having nothing to do while you wait. Like being stuck at the airport when your flight is delayed. You've already gone through security, and your checked baggage is off to destinations unknown. You ponder the relative merits of a \$15 cinnamon bun vs. an \$8 bottle of water. A voice on the intercom drones on about "flight number X is now boarding all rows," but it's never your flight.

James says it's better if you are busy. Don't just sit there. It is best to be patient without waiting for something to do. So, bring a book to read. Dash some notes of appreciation to friends on some special notecards. Bring your laptop and do some work. Make patience productive. Do something that builds the soul and blesses someone else. Don't waste times of spiritual waiting. Let it form you.

Yet, the apostle's primary point is to urge believers to be patient "until the coming of the Lord" (v. 7). This is particularly difficult for us living two millennia after the words were written, and because we require patience to wait for God to intervene or take action in the trials and tribulations we are personally experiencing in real time.

James calls us to wait - not aimlessly, but faithfully - for the Lord's coming. But what do we do with the silence?

It's a great question, and one to which philosophers, theologians, poets, writers and orators of different eras have responded, some pre-dating the apostle James' advice. The Greek philosophers - especially the heavy lifters and heavy hitters like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics - were profoundly concerned with how to live meaningfully in the face of divine silence, fate or uncertainty.

Believers might start asking, "What if Christ doesn't come? What if we're waiting in vain?"

But James isn't advocating resignation. He's calling for active patience, like a farmer waiting for rain (v. 7), trusting that something is growing, even if unseen. The coming of the Lord is not an abstract hope. It is a promised return. James anchors his readers not in absurdity but in assurance: "The Lord is near" (v. 8). We wait, not because God is absent, but because God is patient, too, giving space for grace to work.

James paints waiting, not as worthless, but as meaningful discipline - a kind of spiritual cultivation. James gives us discipline of holy waiting.

Remember "The Miracle on the Hudson"? On January 15, 2009, US Airways Flight 1549 took off from New York's LaGuardia Airport bound for Charlotte, North Carolina. About two minutes into the flight, at an altitude of about 2,800 feet, the plane struck a flock of geese. Both engines failed. In an instant, what began as a routine flight turned into a crisis.

Captain Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger and First Officer Jeffrey Skiles had to act fast. With no engine power and no chance to reach a nearby runway, Sully made a bold decision. He would ditch the Airbus A320 in the Hudson River, right in the heart of New York City.

As the plane descended, Sully's calm voice came over the intercom: "This is the captain. Brace for impact." The flight attendants repeated it down the aisle: "Brace, brace, brace!" Passengers tucked their heads and held on.

With extraordinary skill, Sully glided the aircraft onto the river, landing it miraculously intact. All 155 people on board survived, most with only minor injuries. Ferries, police boats and emergency crews rushed to the scene. The rescue was swift, the response heroic.

The media quickly dubbed it "The Miracle on the Hudson." For those onboard, it wasn't just a miracle. It was a moment of mental clarity, emotional bracing and collective courage. When Sully said "brace," people knew it was going to be rough, but they could survive it - if they were ready.

It's not pleasant to brace. If such a position is required, you know that some sort of impact or collision is imminent. No one wants to hear that their body is about to be assaulted by unbelievable power. In the "Worst Nightmare" category, an impending collision that requires one to brace is certainly near the top of the list.

Yet, figuratively, there are times when we need to brace. James issues an urgent command akin to "Brace, brace, brace!" He writes, "Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near" (v. 8). Or, in the language of your flight attendant, "Ladies and gentlemen, we are now entering an area of turbulence. Please return to your seats and fasten your seatbelts."

James doesn't sugarcoat the Christian life. He knows his audience. These are people who have been mistreated, scattered and tested. Waiting for Jesus doesn't mean waiting in safety. It often means holding on during hard times.

So, James says: "Brace for it." But he isn't calling us to be stoic. He's calling us to be courageous. You don't brace because you're afraid. You brace because you know it's your best chance to survive. You get ready to hold on as though your life depends on it, because it does.

We brace for impact not because we are sure things will change, but because we are certain Christ is in us, no matter what. Faith is not about escaping pain, but about holding fast to Christ in the middle of it.

The bottom line? We brace not only because we have a reasonable expectation of disaster, but also because we have the absolute certainty that God is going to show up in the middle of the shaking. But there's one more thing to consider.

Life throws curve balls. In moments of stress, conflict and confusion, we are sometimes the solution. But other times? We are the problem. Our vision is clouded, our patience thin, and in the pressure of the moment, we turn on each other.

James sees this coming. That's why he writes, "Brothers and sisters, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors!" (v. 9).

That's his advice - simple, practical and wise. When you are waiting - or even bracing - don't bite off each other's heads.

James says don't do it. When hope is delayed, people get testy. Families argue. Churches split hairs. Patience wears thin and criticism flows easily. But James steps in with a gentle, urgent reminder: "The Judge is near." In other words, "No one made you the boss. You're not in charge of each other. God is."

When we're stressed, it's tempting to blame and find fault in our neighbor, spouse, fellow church member or pastor. But that only makes the waiting harder and heavier. It divides when it should unite. It distracts us from our real calling: to stand together, especially when the pressure is on.

Instead of grumbling, James calls us to something better: "Strengthen your hearts." Encourage one another. Remind each other that a harvest is coming. Speak hope instead of criticism. Extend grace instead of judgment. Don't tear down; build up. That's what it means to, in the immortal words of Queen Elsa, Let it go, let it go, let it go! Let go of not just our frustrations, but our need to be right, be first, or find someone to blame.

When we understand this, there will be no "grumbling against one another." Instead, we model our lives on those who got it right. James himself reminds us: "Indeed, we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the outcome that the Lord brought about, for the Lord is compassionate and merciful" (v. 11).

We let it be. We do not turn on one another. We are gentle and patient. We understand what it is like to walk in someone else's shoes. We do not wander. We "bring back" wanderers to safe haven.

Advent is a season of in-between. Christ has come - but Christ is coming again. While we wait, let's be busy with good. While we brace, let's be rooted in faith.

And while we live in this world of tension and trial, let's be known for our grace, not our grumbling.

The day of the Lord is coming. Wait for it. Brace for it. Live like it.
Alleluia, Amen.