

The Patient Farmer – James 5: 7-9

Has anyone thanked you for your patience recently? Often this is a customer service speak way of saying *I'm sorry you had to wait so long... I imagine you are feeling pretty impatient right now... and even please don't take it out on me...*

If we're honest, patience is not exactly a modern virtue... in our age of Amazon Prime and Just Eat, we want it now... even those of us who grew up before next day delivery was a thing... And then of course waiting is a descriptor that's added to words like *list...* to explain the worst kind of waiting, ... where we might be impatient... or eager... or disillusioned... or despairing...

James is writing to a group of Christians with a primarily Jewish background... writing about Jesus' return... widely expected amongst the first Christians as something that would happen pretty soon... in their lifetimes, even... so where was he, they are asking? How long do we have to wait?

Be patient, James writes... and then uses the image of the patient farmer to encourage his readers... Now most of us here are not farmers... but quite a few of us are gardeners... and this year has definitely tested our resources of patience... the cold... the rain... and perhaps most of all... the slugs and snails.... At least some of that is true for the actual farmers in our community, I imagine.

James is setting expectations... encouraging his readers into a better way than the jumpy, foot tapping frustration that we are sometimes given to when queueing... or than the despair and cynicism we may exhibit when waiting... encouraging them to be kind and gentle with one another while they wait...

Enlivening his advice with this picture of the patient farmer...

This is what James says

The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains.

The farmer waits for the precious crop... Not just the crop... the *precious* crop ... *precious* because it will produce wealth for the farmer if all goes according to plan... *precious* because the farmer has lavished much care

on its growth and health... caring for the soil... planting the seeds (now so precisely) ... trying to thwart (by various means) the beasts and diseases that will harm the growing plants...

I wonder what in our churchly world is precious to you? Hymns... bits of the Bible... particular translations... ... stillness and silence? Or lively music ... eucharist... the taste of bread and wine? The feel of a building where others have for centuries prayed...? We all treasure different things... sometimes it's good to remember that what the next person loves is something different to what does it for us...

And remembering this helps us to be patient ...

The word James uses that's translated as patient conjures up an idea of putting up with... being long-suffering... especially in relation to people rather than stuff or circumstances. Its roots are in love ...So Paul writes to the Christians in Corinth using that same word... *love is patient, love is kind...*

We live in an impatient culture... that produces harsh words on social media... so easy to write from the angry heart and hit send.... so hard to recall or restrain... Or perhaps harsh actions (like the violent protests that have occurred following the terrible murders in Southport).

We need to learn to love better, by being forbearing with each other rather than jumping to conclusions, by recognising the unique particular wonder of each person (... and their points of view, especially when these are not views we share) ... by learning to look at each other as God looks at each of us...

In the face of impatience, James counsels restraint... with a particular attitude...

The farmer waits for the (early and the late) rains, James says...

What is this about? It's not the only mention in the Bible of this kind of weather pattern – the phrase turns up in Jeremiah as well as James...and in Deuteronomy, where it says *God will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, and you will gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil;* (Deuteronomy 11)

I think it's an expression about things happening at the right time. For a dry country, parts of Israel get quite a bit of rain... starting in October and

continuing off and on to May – October the early... April/May, the late... the early and the late rains are a shorthand for God's good gifts, for providence... A patient farmer knows that God gives good gifts... actually I think farmers are amongst the most patient people I have ever met... realistic, phlegmatic ... and still hopeful...

The words from Deuteronomy are imagined as spoken when God's people gather on the edge of their new life in the promised land, where they are reminded that as Israel is faithful to God, God will faithfully provide rain in its season...

A reminder that they – and we -are not in this on our own – that God is there, caring for the world and all its creatures.... Just as the farmer... even in an age of GPS guided tractors ... is dependent on the weather for a lot of what the harvest will be like, so we, too, are to remember that we are dependent on God... We may be able to summon our shopping in an instant (if the Tesco Woosh idents are to be believed) ... but that does not make us rulers of all we survey... Rather, we must become ourselves as Christians as we serve... as we seek the welfare of the least around us, not the most powerful... as we allow ourselves to be shaped into the likeness of Christ...

Be patient with one another, James says, trusting God, who provides what we need, when we need it... to live and work to God's glory and our own flourishing...