

## “Perseverance in the faith” James 1:2-4, 22-27 Rogate 2024

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

When it comes to travel, I think many of us are highway people. We want to go the fastest way possible in order to get to our destination as quickly as we can. We aren't really interested in seeing the sights or stopping at the tourist attractions and taking pictures to prove that we were there. Rest stops and food breaks are things that must be endured—impatiently. Our top priority is reaching our destination.

This determination to reach our destination is not only true not only of our travel, but also of our walk (or if you prefer run) through life. We spend our days scurrying around trying to reach our goals while at the same time hoping that they won't take much time or effort. Much to our chagrin we learn sooner or later that things don't happen as quickly as we want.

Life and our Christian walk are more like a marathon than they are a sprint. Every runner knows that if you are ever going to complete a marathon you need to have perseverance. Perseverance is what James writes to his readers about, and thus it is the topic of the sermon and the focus of our thoughts this morning.

James immediately catches us off guard by telling us that we should be joyful when we encounter trials and tribulations. There are many things in life that give us joy, but we do not usually include

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difficult times in the list. But James is insistent that joy be our attitude in the midst of our struggles.

The struggles that James is specifically referring to are not the major life or death situations—persecution for our faith, terminal illnesses, or destroyed relationships, though, perseverance is needed in these also. James, rather, is referring to the everyday struggles of life—the irritations, personality conflicts, time crunches and the rest that make up our lives.

We don’t need to be thankful for the struggles themselves. Our thankfulness comes out of our expectation of the effect that they will have on our lives. Our struggles build perseverance, and perseverance shapes our character.

Many of us have gone through life-changing struggles in our lives. These struggles have made us different people. If the truth be told, however the everyday struggles and trials that we endure do more to shape our lives. It is like the difference between volcanoes and raging rivers. Volcanoes start with a crash and a bang. They are soon over and at most may have created an island. Raging rivers are continuous and over time have created Niagara Falls and other beautiful works of nature.

James writes and tells his readers that our joy in difficult times comes from knowing that the perseverance that is born out of those difficult times produces character, maturity and wholeness.

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If we stop and think about it, the difficult times in our lives are the times when we grow the most. We usually grow a lot more than when we encounter smooth sailing and trouble-free times. Enduring the difficulties in life affect our lives in many ways:

- We grow toward wholeness (not perfection). We nurture all aspects of our lives—emotional, spiritual, and physical.
- Our character is formed. We grow in maturity, and we become people of integrity, strength, compassion, and love.
- The movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives during these times of struggle enables us to develop the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

Perseverance is not only needed to go through the trials and tribulations of life, but also as we respond to God’s grace and answers God’s call upon us for mission and ministry. James challenges his readers to persevere and become doers of the Word and not simply hearers.

Historically the Christian Church has been more interested in what we believe than in how we live out those beliefs. Pastors and priests were more concerned that people believed all the points of the Apostles’ Creed, than whether they treated their co-workers with respect, cheated on their taxes, or were abusive towards spouse or children. James never agreed with this emphasis. For James, how you lived was infinitely more important than your knowledge of Biblical trivia or your gasp on the finer points of theology.

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Today we talk about being authentic. People want to see that our faith goes beyond our words and influences our actions. They want to know that faith makes a difference in our lives.

The missions and ministries that God calls us on are never easy (or God would have called someone else). They take patience and perseverance. We continue being faithful and obedient until our tasks are completed.

Perseverance is not a highly coveted personal attribute today. We are people of the instant now. We don't want to wait. We want things to come quickly and to get to our perceived destination as soon as possible. Still, we are called to persevere and to allow the Spirit to have his work in our lives. This is true in our personal lives where the watch phrase is: “Please be patient God is not through with me yet.” It is also true in our ministries as we seek to demonstrate God's grace and spread God Kingdom. May God grant you powerful perseverance through the power of the Holy Sprit through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.