

Love Calling

"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. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near"

I think one of the saddest aspects of Christianity is this idea of a wrathful, demanding God. So many of us, regardless of our various original denominations, grow up in the faith feeling that somehow we have to measure up before we are worthy of God's love.

This notion is so prevalent that many of God's children simply leave God's house, never to return, because they feel they just don't need the punishment. Life is challenging enough without constantly hearing that we must earn even God's love by attaining some sort of moral or ethical perfection; believing it is only when we are *good enough* then God will love us.

As we approach the third Sunday of Advent, I hope we can all open ourselves to the truth that our God is constantly calling out to us in love. That what God desires most is that we hear this call and turn to God in all things knowing that we are beloved.

This Sunday we will hear the scripture above. In this brief passage from James we hear words of encouragement. This small and struggling church is undergoing some very difficult times.

In response this letter is written out of intense desire to fold them in the knowledge that God is with them in the midst of their pain, that above all, God has the power to bind their wounds no matter how harshly the world is treating them. The call for patience is an invitation to trust in God's love for us.

These words could be misunderstood to mean that we should deny painful or difficult times and the sorrow that comes with them. On the surface, they can seem like thoughtless words to a people who are undergoing suffering.

I cannot imagine in my own ministry telling someone who has just suffered a loss or disappointment to just be patient and everything will be all right eventually—there is no comfort to be found in such thoughtless care as that. So this must mean something far more than that.

"Be patient therefore" doesn't deny or promise an end to suffering, loss, fear, poverty, rage or death. But it does promise that the power of God's love for us is always close at hand--- so close that when we stumble and fall or when the world pushes us down ---that God wants to come along side us in our pain. To hold us and soothe us until we can bear our own weight again.

I remember in my own life my mother gave me my first experience of this kind of love. When I came to her in tears from a scraped knee or hurt feelings she never told me to hush up or quit being a crybaby.

Her first response was always to pick me up, hold me close and rock me in her arms. She would hold me this way until I could speak and then she would listen to my tale of woe or bandage the knee, being sure to blow softly on the scrape to ease the sting of the antiseptic.

And as I grew up and my wounds became more complicated she found new ways to bind up my broken heart. She still just listened, uttered soft words of love and then she would always follow up with a phone call the next day to see if I was okay. That simple phone call held a wealth of love.

You see, through this kind of consistent care she taught me that I did not need to fear falling. Knowing she was there in this way taught me that even when life was not going my way, I could still risk hope and love, because falling, while painful, wasn't fatal.

Now expand the nature of this kind of love out into God's realm and imagine the power of God's comfort. God desires nothing more than to be there for us always.

This love doesn't depend on the state of our lives, only on the state of God's desire—which is to bind up our wounds always. And most importantly, perhaps, through Jesus, God teaches us how to bind up one another's wounds with the same selfless love.

We all need to be loved, soothed, and encouraged in ways large and small—we do not outgrow this human need. God has already made us worthy of God's love. Embrace the deep grace of this Advent promise.

Grace and Peace, Stephanie+