

Grace and peace are yours through our coming Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus loves you just the way you are. And he loves you too much to let you stay just as you are. Can we think about that for a second? Is it ok if I repeat it? Jesus loves you just the way you are. And he loves you too much to let you stay just as you are. That's not an original thought. I've heard a pastor say it. I've seen it on that great purveyor of all theological truth: Facebook! But that thought really comes from Jesus himself. He loves you just the way you are. And he loves you too much to let you stay that way. That's a long definition, but a good one for our key word today: repent! Repent means change. Repent is a change of heart about your sin and your Savior. Repent is a change of mind about what's really worth it. Repent is a change of action closer to holiness and toward more godliness. And let's be clear: each of these three things, change of heart, mind, and action, are changes only God can work in us. And changes God is patiently working in us right now. Why change? Because Jesus loves you just the way you are. And he loves you too much to let you stay just as you are.

Look at who you are! Beloved. Beloved. We repeat this Bible word often in our order of service. God loves you because he chose to love you, not because you earned it. Not even because you desired it. God's love is a love that gives us what we need: a change in heart, mind and action, not what we deserve or even desire.

We can't overlook this one fact. We can't let this escape our notice, or just let it get pushed out of the way. With the Lord one day is as a thousand years. And a thousand years as one day. Time doesn't matter to God like it matters to us. God is timeless, eternal. God uses even time to serve his purpose of grace. Some might count the days and think the Lord is slow to fulfill his promise. From the first time God promised to send Jesus to die for our sins until God actually sent Jesus was at least 4000 years. Long time? A few days for the Lord. It's been almost 2000 years since Jesus ascended into heaven and promised to come back. A long time? A couple days for the Lord.

This supposed slowness, this perceived patience, can lead us into sin, in so many ways. God isn't going to do anything. He won't ever punish me or anyone else. If God were so upset by sin, why doesn't he do something? I don't need a change of heart. God loves me just the way I am. Look at how things keep going on the same, year after year. Maybe we don't think that so much this year. Or maybe we are upset at God for his patience. Why doesn't God punish those bad people? Then they would get what they have coming. Must be only bad people who got COVID. I didn't because I'm a good person. And God's supposed slowness is an excuse for sin. His perceived patience is an excuse for self-righteous sin. Do you know the idea of the word patient? Long suffering. Maybe the older among us recall that word from older Bible translation. God is long suffering. He suffers a long time and endures a lot of sin from a lot of people. Long years, Jesus suffered threats and mocking. But all those long years, Jesus lived a perfect life. Long hours, Jesus suffered on the cross, dying. But after all those long hours, Jesus died, to forgive your sins of self-righteousness, laziness, forgetting God. Three long days, Jesus stayed dead, in the grave. But after he suffered the long agony of death, he rose! He lives! He suffered long for you, so you will not suffer long, but will live eternally.

Why is God so patient? Why does he suffer so long and endure so much sin? Why doesn't he take revenge when he could? Because he doesn't wish any to perish, eternally in hell. He wants all to reach

repentance. He wants to change all of our hearts about sin, that we see sin as serious and best of all, see how serious our Savior is in loving you! God will suffer a long time for just one more person to reach repentance. We've heard it said and repeated about COVID 19 efforts, "This is all worth it if it saves one life." Well, if all this is worth it to extend the time of one life on earth, how much more will God be patient to give one more person time to be brought to repentance and faith and eternal life, forever? And here's something really cool, every time a person is baptized, that one more person is brought to repent. Baptism is your personal change of heart, worked by God. I know it doesn't look like much on the surface if you've seen it. I know you might not personally remember your own baptism. But God does. He never forgets that one fact. God never forgets the day he changed your heart. God will never overlook that change of mind he gave. Baptism changed you, for the better. Baptism means your heart is changed to hate sin and love God. Your mind is changed to think the way God thinks. For God to let the earth go on 7000 more years, for one more person to reach repentance? What's a week? Isn't that worth it?

Your heart has been changed to rejoice in God's patience, that brought you to repentance. Your mind has been changed to see what's really important. The day of the Lord will come! The day of the Lord means the last day, the end of the world, the day the Lord returns to this earth. The day of the Lord will come! It's certain. Definite. It will come suddenly, secretly, unexpectedly, and then...

And then! The heavens will pass away with a roar, like a rush of jets flying by, and the heavens will be gone. The heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, melted like a pebble dropped in a volcano. And then! The earth and the works that are done in it will be exposed. Wow! Did this make me stop and think and have God change my mind. What works that are done do I want to be exposed? Wouldn't the greatest work be that God used me to have one more soul reach repentance, have a change in heart and mind and actions? Or am I most excited that I ran a marathon? Wouldn't I be most excited that I was able to teach my children God's Word, and let God's Word change their hearts and minds and actions? But wow, watch me cheer at a track meet, or smile at a forensics presentation or travel the world for a hockey club and maybe you'll get a better sense of what deeds I really value. What deeds do you want to be exposed? What deeds will be exposed? All the works will be exposed. All the deeds that were done.

Scary? Could be. If it weren't for Jesus, covering those deeds with his perfect life, forgiving those deeds with his holy, precious blood and innocent suffering and death, burying those deeds in an empty tomb, left for dead once and for all. Do you see what repentance means? It means a change of mind. Jesus is what really matters. Why bother living for the things of this earth, when the earth will be destroyed? How much better to live for God, to live for eternal things, to have your heart changed, your mind changed, your actions changed.

Think about what sort of people you ought to be! This isn't guilt. You should be this way, but you are not. The way these words are written and the words chosen indicate it's necessary for you to start being this excellent sort of people. You need to really be, for real, people with changed actions, actions changed to line up with God's actions, lives of holiness and godliness. You need to be, really be, people brought to repentance, people who realize, Jesus loves me just the way I am, but Jesus loves me too much to let me stay just the way I am. I need my actions changed to holiness. I know, holiness means perfection and that's not possible for us sinful people. But holiness is still the goal. Holiness means being set apart from the ordinary, for the extraordinary. Holiness makes the ordinary, extraordinary. Jesus

says, "Giving a cup of cold water to someone who needs it, is an extraordinary work. Sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to his Word, that an extraordinary action, giving rather than receiving, that's the way to live the life of holiness." Maybe that changes our words and actions. Maybe we want to repent and start asking, "What do you want to give for Christmas?" Holiness is a way of life, walking the walk, not just talking the talk. Godliness is respect and reverence for God that says, "God is awesome! I have such great respect for God, I will do whatever he says, even when it's not easy, or popular. God is so awesome I'm going to live my life for him. God is so awesome I am going to examine every action in my life and change any action that God wants me to change. It's awesome that God loves me just the way I am. It's even more awesome that God loves me too much to let me stay just as I am."

Remember repentance, a change of heart God works. A change of mind, God brings. A change of action, God keeps on working. A change in outlook. We are waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God. I remember making a paper chain on December 1, when I was in first grade. The chain had 25 links, one for each day until Christmas. Each morning, rip off one more chain and it's one day closer to Christmas. Man did it seem like those chains couldn't come off fast enough. I often thought, "If I rip off more chains each day, will Christmas come sooner?" That's the changed attitude God tells us to have toward the coming of the day of God. Just like a child can't wait for Jesus' coming at Christmas, so we can't wait for Jesus to come at the end of the world. And if there's something, anything I can do to make that day come faster, I'll do it.

Well, I can't just tear off the paper chains sooner and make Christmas come sooner. But God says there are things I can do to hasten the day when I will see God face to face. One is spread the good news about Jesus. Jesus said, "The good news about me will be preached in all the world before the end will come." What greater, more eternal thing to do on earth, that I want to have laid bare, than to tell simple good news? "I can't wait for Jesus to come at Christmas." Second thing I can do is pray. Come, Lord Jesus. Come quickly, Lord Jesus. I think I've prayed that more this year than any other year in my life. I've had more people ask me this year, "Do you think this is the end of the world?" It's good to be praying that and thinking about that. It shows a changed mind, thinking about what is eternal, a changed heart that is focused on heaven, and I pray it leads to changed actions. Because that's the third thing we can do to hasten the coming of the day of God: live lives of holiness and godliness. Our changed lives don't get us to heaven. But they might get someone else to ask, "What's different about you? Why have you changed?" Because Jesus gave me the greatest change: repentance. He loved me just the way I was, but he loved me way too much to let me stay that way. Amen.

The Lord is patient toward you, wishing all to reach repentance. Amen.