

Another Name for Patience Jan L. Richardson

Today I'm hanging out with James. (James 5.7-10), tells us this:

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. Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. (NRSV)

I'm struck by James's repetition of the word **beloved**. Once, and again, and a third time still he uses this word, addressing his correspondents with a trinity of beloveds. **Belovedbelovedbeloved**. The repetition has become like a heartbeat as I've lived with his words this week.

James tells his beloved ones to be patient as they wait for the coming of Christ. Patience is a word I have trouble with; virtuous though it may be, patience tends to carry connotations of idleness, of biding one's time because one can't or won't do something to move things along.

I know the wisdom of having times of not-doing. I am well accustomed to stillness, to emptying, to delayed gratification. I know how to take the long view, to **be** rather than **do**, to understand that things have their seasons.

Still, I don't like the word **patience**. I think part of my trouble is that the word is sometimes used by folks who seem to have the most power in a given situation, the people who have the means to produce the desired result but who, for whatever reason, are tarrying, or have no intention of getting things done.

There are times of waiting that call us to stillness. And there are times of waiting that call us to doing, to find some measure of power, to find good work to offer. Even in times of stillness, there is cultivation to be done.

James tells his beloved ones to be patient (in the equivalent Greek word, a form of **makrothumeo**). But he offers some images that I find helpful, that flesh it out and lend depth and power to what seems like an overdone word.

Here are some lines that came from my pondering of James's words.

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Beloved,
don't tell me
to be patient.
I am done
with this idle
not-doing,
this waiting that
wastes
and dulls.

Tell me, beloved,
to strengthen my heart.
Tell me to look to the ones
who spoke fire.
Tell me there is work to do
in the waiting,
a field to be cultivated,
a place to labour
during the watching

until,
beloved,
I lay myself down
among the
ready harvest,
spent and
drenched with the rains
early and
late.