

11 December 2022—Advent 3: James 5 7-10

Conversion Part 3 of 4

We are in the middle of a four-part teaching series on Conversion. So far, we have learned four things: the *context* for conversion is the community of faith; the *means* of conversion is patterning our lives on Jesus; the *mission* of conversion is hospitality; and the *fruit* of conversion is hope.

Today we see the *magnitude* and the *place* of conversion. We believe God is omnipresent: that is, there is no place God is not. We also believe this eternal boundless Presence is loving. God is not present always and everywhere as we might be physically during a dull sermon, our minds 100 miles away. God is always fully, lovingly present; always calling creation into communion, always longing to fill all things with God's love without end. This is so for each person without end. There is no part of us that can possibly remain untouched as we seek the grace of God. This is the magnitude of our conversion.

What subverts our conversion into Christ is not what we think. Our sins do not hold us back, at least no longer than it takes to surrender them after we commit them. What holds us back is timidity and fear. We guiltily obsess over the past; we fume and fuss for the future. Our souls' enemy delights if we are faint-hearted or self-obsessed, if we are shame-filled or frightened since any of them divert us from living in the present.

The magnitude of our conversion is all encompassing of who we are. Just as what sabotages our conversion is not what we assume, neither is the path forward. We live the desire for God's full conversion through patience. In today's Epistle, James reminds us to be patient, and uses the analogy of the farmer. Holy patience accepts the healing grace of God in our lives today as God wills and provides, as we are prepared to receive such healing. We let go of fixation on past sin—except as we need God's grace now to heal us from our sins then; neither are we anxious about the future—we believe God's grace will be sufficient tomorrow. God calls us to conversion today, patiently receiving whatever God's grace provides each moment. We are converted by desiring God's grace in our lives continually as God wills.

James also gives us the *place* of conversion: which is the life of each believer. The context of conversion, as we learned two weeks ago, is the community of faith. However, God longs to touch and transform the life of each individual Christian, making a new and unique expression of Christ in the world. While other Christians may be supportive, or hindrances, we neither live vicariously through others, nor use others' failings as excuses for our own lack of progress. James writes: "*You also must be patient...Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged.*" It is a seductive temptation to compare oneself to others. Sometimes, we assume others 'have it all together' and we are spiritual nincompoops; or we see un-Christian behavior and think ourselves superior; or, worst, we see a bland, tepid Christianity, and settle for living an ineffectual life.

The place of conversion is not a geographic location; the time of conversion is not some hoped-for future. We are the place of our conversion, and the time is today. We enter our own place of conversion through self-examination and surrender, with the wisdom of others farther along the journey. We need others' wisdom because we are prone to self-deception. A soul-friend assists us in honest self-assessment. Also, we can be too hard on ourselves with things of relatively little importance and too easy with what subverts us but because of blindness, fear, or self-will we cannot face. A soul friend provides perspective, helps us rely on God's grace to overcome obstacles. A soul friend helps us see our surpassing worth in God's estimation and helps us be patient with God, others, and ourselves.

Friends, be patient with God, one another, and yourself: Jesus loves you and will give you grace and strength today. There will be times of frustration, you will know periods of loneliness, even sensations of abandonment; at times you will be fearful, want to give up. Such things only indicate you are mortal. Trust God will give you maybe not what you want but what you need today and always. Journey with Christ into your place of conversion—your own life as you are right now—and there know love and grace, hope and freedom without end.

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive be yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, now and forever. Amen.