

This sermon could also be entitled 'Memento mori', remember that you will die once. Today is the last Sunday of the church year because next week Advent begins. On this last Sunday of the year the church traditionally looks ahead to the future. We will do this as well, helped by James, esp. 5:8. [This is the last sermon in our series on James.]

James expects the Lord's return soon and he urges his readers to be alert. But more than 1900 years later we are still waiting for Jesus and it might be a while still. You know me, I am not the one to say that the Lord will return tomorrow. We simply do not know the day of his return.

In the meantime James does encourage the poor in his congregation to suffer the oppression by the rich (5:1-6). These rich people are piling up God's judgment against themselves. God will vindicate the poor and he will judge the rich oppressors.

I would give a turn to what James says: Those of us who are of a certain age need to prepare for our death. In fact readiness to die is very similar to readiness for the coming of the Lord.

I hope that the older people among us will prepare to die well. Such a conscious preparation is more than just 'hanging in' or passively waiting. It means for example:

1. Settle your accounts literally. Make sure there are no unpaid bills.
2. Settle your accounts metaphorically. Make sure there are no unsolved situations.
3. Talk things through with the people around you. Be reconciled with others if you possibly can.

To the young people I say: prepare to live well. Make decisions for life: what do you want to do, what are your ideals, will you follow Jesus? This does not guarantee you an easy life, though. We can only hope and pray for God's blessing. In any case, make sure you don't come in for criticism as in 5:1-6. Money is not the aim of life. And don't try to be the best: most people are ordinary people, called to do ordinary things well. Few of us can become Prime Minister, even though there are now several every year.

If already in James' days perseverance was hard, it is all the more now! We need each other! We need to prepare for the future. We need much grace, much of the Spirit.