I am so glad to be with you at St. Paul’s Church today. This our best day. When I say, “this is our best day” you might turn to the person next to you with a puzzled look on your face. You might say to yourself, “It is a cold, cloudy, windy day in Syracuse. The night is long and the day is short. It will snow in a few hours. What could possibly make this the best day?”

We are doing exactly what we are supposed to be doing today. What is great about today is this: you are here, and she is here and he is here and I am here and we are working together. Our work is to prepare for a new birth of God’s love in our lives. Our work is to make St. Paul’s part of the new work of God’s love in the world. All of this preparation, all of this work is what makes today the very best day.

In order to understand this, think back to a time when you worked with a group of people to prepare for something important. For me, I think back to when I was a member of the choir in high school. At my high school we didn’t just have a choir, we had a choral music department. We had a womens choir and a mens choir. We had the jazz and soul ensemble and the high school chorus, which was a preparatory choir for those who hadn’t sung in a choir before.

And we had the Scott High School symphonic choir. Our symphonic choir had 90 members and you had to audition to become a member. We rehearsed every day during third period. Choir rehearsal was always the high point of the day. We sang all sorts of music from Broadway musicals to Brahms.

Our annual Christmas Concert was one of the biggest events of the year for the entire school. We presented the concert three times in the school auditorium in order to accommodate all of the students, teachers and family members who would attend. Each year at Christmas we would present a group of selections from Handel’s Messiah, spirituals and Gospel settings of Christmas music and Christmas favorites, like the Carol of the Bells.

But the main thing I want you to understand is that for me and my friends preparing for the annual Christmas concert was just as good as the concert itself. We had lots of extra rehearsals. I was the accompanist for the choir so in the two weeks before the concert I spent every afternoon after school in the choir room rehearsing with the soloists who would sing the recitatives and arias from the Messiah. The day before our first concert one group of choir members would decorate the auditorium while my friends and I moved the grand piano from the choir room through the halls of the school into the auditorium. Eight of us would literally lift the grand piano onto the stage of the auditorium.

By the time we sang the first notes for an audience we were filled with the joy that comes from working with people you care about. After a year or two of this I realized I was looking forward to the Christmas concert but I was looking forward to preparing for the Christmas concert even more. This was our time to work together, to enjoy each other’s company and to encourage each other through the challenges.

There is a tremendous amount of goodness, strength and even joy in the time of preparation. This is good news for us because in some way we are spending our entire lives in a time of preparation. We are preparing for divine love to be the beginning, the middle and the end of our lives.

We often do not understand or do not remember that we are preparing for the love of God to be the beginning, the middle and the end of our lives. We tend to be impatient. We do not want to make our way through this next chunk of work, in our nation, in our community, in our church or within our souls. We are impatient with ourselves and with each other because we do not know what the finished product will look like. If you are feeling impatient with the work and the preparation, if you are feeling like you have had enough of this part of your life, I have a suggestion for you. Love the people you are with. Spend more time with the people who love you. Take care of the people you are journeying beside, because they are going through the same challenges you are.
Do not rush through this time. In the time of preparation we do not have all of the answers. In the time of preparation we are not always sure of the best way forward. Try to enjoy this time of preparation. Try to find joy in the fact that we do not have all of the answers. Even in the times when you feel exhausted from the struggle, try to find joy in the fact that we are working together, we are struggling together through this time when nothing is just right.

We are spending our lives in this in-between place. The work will never be finished. Things will never be just right. This is our reality. Embrace it. Love the people. If you are ready for a big challenge, try to love all of the people.

Our reading from 2 Peter is about this reality; the work never seems to be finished, that there always seems more to do. The author of the letter puts it this way: What sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God? While you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; I have no idea what the author is talking about when he says, ‘without spot or blemish’ because I am pretty sure that every person I have ever known has had plenty of blemishes, plenty of imperfections. There are no people, not even any of your favorite saints, who did not have plenty of imperfections.

However, the author’s main idea is in the final sentence of our reading: regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. There are at least three messages in this sentence.

First, use the Lord, that is, Christ Jesus, as your example. Jesus is a great example of living in-between times. Jesus prayed to God and, in a certain way, Jesus was with God all of the time. Jesus came from God and Jesus returned to God. In between he spent more than thirty years struggling with the same sorts of challenges you and I face, and sometimes much worse. People called him names. Some people tried to trick him and get him into trouble with the authorities. Sometimes he was working so hard there was no time to rest or eat. One group of people got so mad they chased him out of town. Jesus and his family were refugees and had to escape from a terrible ruler.

Your situation is a lot like Jesus’ situation. You often find yourself dealing with people who are unhelpful or even hostile. Sometimes you work so hard you do not have enough time to rest. Sometimes it seems like the work will never end. Jesus is your example because Jesus spent his life preparing for the big day. Jesus is your example because you came from God and you are on a journey back to God.

Second, consider the sort of patience revealed in the life of Jesus. It was not the sort of patience that was silent in the face of injustice or evil. Jesus’ patience meant finding ways to give power to the powerless. Some people think patience means not making a fuss when you see evil things happening in the world. That was not Jesus’ sort of patience. Jesus was patient by never giving up in the face of evil. Some people think patience means sitting quietly and sticking to your own business. That was not Jesus’ sort of patience. Jesus was patient by being active in the world and by paying attention to what was really happening to others, especially to those who had the least power.

Third, regard the patience of the Lord as salvation. Literally. A Jesus style patience will be your salvation. I see this salvation in you in many ways. When I see you working together in spite of the fact that none of you is perfect, when I see you not giving up in the face of the challenges, I see that you have some of the patience of God in you. This is your salvation.

I know that you have been working hard for many years. Do not give up. Try to not rush through this part. This is a holy time in your life and in our lives. Jesus showed it was holy by living exactly the way we live. Though it may be hard, though you may be tired, embrace this life of preparation we have been given. Love each other. This is our best day.