

# **Begin With the End in Mind**

**November 15, 2020**

**Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church Pastor Dr. Eric G. Peterson**

I Thessalonians 5:1-11

This morning we are reminded there will come a day at the end of our lives when we see our Lord face to face. What a blessing that day will be. Our Lord who came into the world to bear our sin and die for us on the cross will welcome us home in His Father's house. None of us can know the moment or the hour when our life may end. And if by some reason we are still alive when Jesus comes again, His coming will be like a thief in the night, when we least expect it. Jesus will come with all his Holy Angels; a trumpet will sound, and Jesus will judge the living and the dead. We need to be ready!

In his letter to the Thessalonians which was read this morning, St. Paul ended each of the five chapters with a call to get ready because Jesus is coming. Today is the second to the last Sunday in the Church year. It reminds us that just like the Church year is almost over, life as we know it, also has an end. All life has a direction, and we are moving toward a time of a new beginning. The image of Jesus' coming like a thief in the night is a negative image. It really does not capture the excitement and the hope that is connected with Jesus' second coming. A thief comes to steal and to take away what belongs to us. Jesus does not come like a thief, but He comes to fulfill all of God's promises since the beginning of creation to make all things new. Ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin, sin shattered God's creation with suffering and death. The scripture tells us that in love, God set in motion a plan to create a new heaven and a new earth and put an end to sin and an end to death. Where sin separated us from God, God's plan is to bring us into fellowship with Himself through Jesus Christ. Jesus' coming is such a blessing that He taught us to pray for it every day. In the Lord's prayer, Jesus said for us to pray, "***Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in***

***heaven.*** Jesus' coming again is the highest hope of every believer. Our hope is like the spiritual hymn says, "*Soon and very soon we are going to see the king! Soon and very soon we are going to see the king! No more crying there, we are going to see the King! No more dying there, we are going to see the King, Hallelujah, Hallelujah we're going to see the King.*"

The Thessalonians were a young church. The Apostle Paul spent a very short time with them preaching and teaching the Gospel and establishing their church. Paul's ministry was opposed by the local Jewish community and because of the opposition, he experienced he was forced to leave Thessalonica. His forced departure from this young Christian community in the middle of persecution filled Paul with a concern for their spiritual welfare. So Paul sent Timothy to be with the Thessalonians to encourage their faith. When Timothy returned to Paul after visiting the Thessalonians, he reported to Paul the good news that the congregation remained strong. Paul was elated. And in thanksgiving, he wrote First Thessalonians to continue to encourage their faith. He wanted to assure them that their faithfulness to Christ was not in vain. Jesus was coming and His salvation was drawing near. This was not a time to wait around and be idle, or to be disengaged in the work God had given to them to share the Gospel. This was a time like the last two minutes of a football game, to give everything they had to win the game. This is true for us too. The time in which we are now living is a time when we need to be fully engaged in the mission God has given to us to share the good news of His salvation.

In today's Gospel, Jesus reminds us to use our gifts and invest them for the Lord. Do not waste a moment. We need to use whatever gifts God has given us to serve God and to share God's love. Time is short! The Lord could return at any time.

Have you ever been caught unprepared? If you have you know how it makes you feel. When I was in college a group of my friends and I spent some time at my parents' cottage out on Long Island. My father needed the sidewalk in front of the cottage to be replaced. It was a big job, but

fortunately, my friends agreed to help me. Unfortunately, we forgot about the sidewalk and focused on having a good time. After about four days, my father showed up unexpectedly. To this day, I can remember the disappointment in my father's face when he saw the mess we created and instead of a new sidewalk there was a big hole in the ground. I felt devastated because I disappointed my father. That was bad. But Imagine meeting our Lord when He comes again, and He asks you and I what we have done with the gifts He gave to us? All the servants in today's Gospel wanted to hear their master say, "***Well done, thou good and faithful servant.***" And hopefully, we too will invest ourselves in living for Jesus and sharing His love so that He will say those same words to us. "***Thank you, well done, my good and faithful servant.***"

St. Paul reminded the Thessalonians that they were sons of the light and sons of the day. This meant that they were blessed by God to have received the revelations of God's love for them in Jesus Christ. We too are children of the light. Jesus Christ has revealed to us a great hope of everlasting life. God has not appointed us to suffer His wrath but to receive His salvation. As Christians we are never to be afraid of Christ's coming again. Salvation is a gift of God. In Christ, our sins have been forgiven and we have been made heirs of God's kingdom. Jesus said it another way, "***Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so I would have told you. And I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.***" [John 14:1-4] This is the good news of the Gospel. We have a certain hope in Christ of a future that is prepared for us.

St. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to focus on the second coming of Christ so that they would know what to focus on in their daily living. There is an expression: "***The last day of our lives defines what we do every day we live.***" It is easy for us to get caught up in the busyness of everyday activities, but busyness is not the same as significant. What if

you were working hard painting a wall and someone comes up to you and informs you that your ladder is leaning against the wrong wall? What a waste! How many people are busy, working hard, but wasting their lives on things that are not important? The last Sunday in the Church year is Christ the King Sunday. It reminds us to live backward. Begin planning your life with the end in mind.

We are living in a challenging time, a time when being a Christian is not popular. It is a time when standing up for your Christian values or standing up for what you believe will demand a price. The Thessalonians knew this and yet they willingly kept their faith and shared the good news of the Gospel, even in the face of persecution. They were on fire with the Holy Spirit. Heat is to fire; what missions are to the church. To know God's love in Jesus Christ is the greatest joy that anyone can experience, and it is the greatest gift that we can share with those we love. When God loved...he reached out to us and He sent His Son to be our Savior. And when we know the love of God, God's love compels us to reach out with the love of Christ to others. Faith and serving go together, just like love and giving.

These are challenging times for all of us and certainly for the mission of the Church. But it is not a time to lose heart. St. Paul wrote "***We do not lose heart, though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are not seen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.***" (II Corinthians 4:14-10)

Jesus is coming again. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Soon we are going to see the King.