
THE DAY OF THE LORD IS DRAWING NEARERSermon for the 24th Sunday after Pentecost, 2017

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the Second Reading from before, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11: **¹ Fellow-Christians, you do not need us to write to you about times and dates, ² because you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord is coming like a thief in the night. ³ When people are saying, “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come on them suddenly like labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will certainly not escape. ⁴ You, however, fellow-Christians, are not in darkness, that this day should overtake you like a thief. ⁵ For you are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to darkness. ⁶ Therefore let us not sleep, like the rest, but let us keep awake and be sober! ⁷ For people who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. ⁸ However, let us, who live in the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and the hope of salvation as a helmet! ⁹ For God has not appointed us to His wrath, but to gain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ He has died for us, so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him. ¹¹ Therefore, encourage each other and build one another up, as in fact you are doing!**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your Truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We are nearing the end of the Church Year. As we draw closer to the season of Advent, once again God has given us the grace to remember that this world is not all that there is, and that the end is coming.

Paul writes to the Church of the Thessalonians - and really intended and expected that all Christians everywhere would finally hear his words, that they really did not need to be told what he was about to write. He says, ¹**Fellow-Christians, you do not need us to write to you about times and dates**. Paul was reminding them of the obvious - something that they could sense from the world around them and its corruption, and something that was part and parcel of the Christian hope - the end is near. We don't need to be told this either - we know it already, and we have heard it year after year after year. We don't know precisely how many "last days" there are, but each day that passes brings the end of time one day closer for sure. As Paul says, so we also know, that **the day of the Lord**, that last great day of resurrection, will come **just like a thief in the night**. It will come suddenly, unexpectedly and with no warning.

That day is described as coming **like a thief in the night** because it is not going to be generally expected by the world around us when it comes, and because it is not bringing good things to all. In fact, for most people, the day is a day of horror and sorrow and damnation - and the public humiliation of being called out before all of mankind as one of those who stupidly refused the goodness and love of God.

That day is going to come when the world least expects it. When the world around the church and outside of the church and posing as part of the Church finally convinces itself that nothing is ever going to happen, and that the end, long-promised in Scripture, is really not going to come, that is when it will happen. It is going to catch them all off-guard. There will be no warning, no time to prepare, no last-minute accommodations or getting ready. They will be caught flat-footed and red-handed in their sin and unbelief.

Paul writes, ⁴**You, however, fellow-Christians, are not in darkness, that this day should overtake you like a thief.** ⁵**For you are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to darkness.**" Paul means that we, on the other hand, should never be caught off-guard. We know it is coming. If we haven't wrapped our minds around that

thought yet, then we need to get wrapping! The end is coming and it is coming soon. The difference between us and the world around us is day and night - we are of the day and in the light of the Lord and His Word, and the world is of the night and in darkness. The day of the Lord should not catch us unprepared, or surprise us in sin and unbelief. We know that the end is near.

We also know the grace of God in Jesus Christ. We know that He died and rose for us. We have heard and believe what a terrible thing sin is, and how great a price was paid for our salvation! The price is the cross. We constantly remember what Jesus has done on our behalf and hear how He has cleansed us and how He forgives us. We eat of His body and drink of His blood - the body which was given for us and the blood shed for us in death - and do so, as Jesus commanded, also in remembrance of Him. We walk in the light of God's grace and love day by day - which means that we are to keep that truth uppermost in our minds day to day, not just on Sundays. Paul suggests, and God says clearly, that we cannot honestly believe all that He has revealed to us and still be caught off-guard, unprepared, and self-deceived.

That is what Paul calls sleeping, in our text. Sleeping, or drunk. **“⁷ For people who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night.”** Either we must be wide awake, alert and prepared, expecting Jesus to return, or we are either unconscious or purposefully out of contact with the realities that God has pressed on our attention with so many warnings and exhortations. **“⁸ However, let us, who live in the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and the hope of salvation as a helmet!”** We are the people of the day and of the light - not lost in the dark like the world around us.

That means that there must be a difference in how we handle life and the expectation of the coming of the end, and how we handle ourselves in that expectation. We are not to be of the number of those who sleep, as though they did not know which day is coming. Sleep, here, means to act as though unaware of the great spiritual realities confronting us. We cannot behave as though we have all the time in the world and no urgency about what we do. We actually *do have* all the time in the world, but the world is simply running out of time, and there are so many who need to know of Jesus, and we need to

prepare ourselves as well. We need to be alert and sober. In part that means we need to be honest about our sins - to confess them, and repent of them and hear and believe the gospel of our forgiveness and salvation. We also face terrible dangers, and not the kind that everyone around us face. We face discrimination and persecution which God promises will only grow more severe as time passes. We face strong temptations to doubt. We face temptations to lusts and pleasures. We face temptations to fear, and we face death.

These are not pretend terrors and dangers. They are effective and powerful. They are the tools of the enemy - the devil who *prowls about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour*. All too often, Christians are deceived by what they perceive to be a long time and God delaying His return. We have each seen friends, and sometimes members of our own families, seduced by this problem of perception and led to walk away. But the end is coming and it is coming soon! Those who fall asleep, as regards the faith, are distracted by the pressures of life. There is so much else to do. They slowly find themselves weaned of the habit of regular worship - weaned away to visiting, traveling, sporting events, and who knows what else. They find themselves weaned away from hunger for the truth, and attracted by short services, or entertainment, or a warm and sticky sense of nostalgia - rather than the pure milk of the Word, and the wonderful treasure of the Holy Supper. Now, occasionally missing worship may be inconsequential, but when we allow ourselves to be persuaded that it doesn't matter at all, sometimes we find ourselves slipping away. It starts by irregular attendance, perhaps missing once a month, then attending once a month, then once every couple of months, and then it seems to be too much trouble and takes too much time to stop and worship at all.

That is the sleep into which so many are lulled. That sense that it is not urgent is the drink which intoxicates so many and blinds even our reason and dulls even our senses until those who have become drunk cannot tell that they have stopped believing. They cannot feel the big emptiness inside until it is too late. Like the drunk who thinks he is sober and could fool anyone, and yet everyone else can see that he is unsteady, sometimes we become so sure that we know all that we need, and we don't need a sermon or a Bible Study, that we anoint ourselves priest and expert, and then we will just believe what we

want to and make sure our religion doesn't get in our way or accuse us of sin. There are entire church bodies that have followed that path!

But the time for such silliness and unconsciousness is at night, in the dark - that is to say, those are the thoughts and the errors of the world. We are of the day. We know our need, we know the danger, we know our weakness, and we know where we find our strength and comfort. We understand that all we possess in Christ is the gift of God through His Word, through the hearing of His Word. We need that comfort, even when we are not aware of our need. We need that strength, even when we do not feel our weakness. We need the Word - and it is not the Pastor's word, even though he speaks it. It is God's Word, poured out through the mouth and lips of the faithful preacher. We need the heavenly food which God sets before us in His Holy Supper! This isn't some ordinary bread and wine, this is the very body and blood of Jesus Christ, once given and shed on the cross for us, now offered to us by Christ Himself. It is a heavenly mystery which delivers all that Christ won for us by giving His body and shedding His blood.

True, we cannot see all of that or taste it, but we are not so sleepy or intoxicated that we cannot believe that God can do what He promises. Here is forgiveness, and because it is forgiveness, it is also life and salvation! This holy food does not merely nourish the tissues of our body, it feeds and strengthens our soul and comforts us in times of distress and temptation, and **since we are all children of the day. We do not belong to the night... let us keep awake and be sober,** and prepare ourselves for the coming day, and the dangers that await us on the way.

Paul speaks here of **the breastplate of faith and love, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.** That is our armour - faith in God, love for one another, and the confident expectation that when this life is done, life isn't over, rather, death is. Our faith is the very thing that the world around us calls superstition, and foolishness, and wishful thinking. This is the armour against the pessimism of this age, the hopelessness that settles upon so many. No matter what is happening around us, even in our own lives, we know that we have God's love and that His will for us is always our salvation. We can trust God - and faith always does. Knowing God does not decrease your pain or limit your

frustrations. It isn't intended to do so. The pains and frustrations probably increase. The devil wants you to doubt, wants you to despair, and wants you to give in to hopelessness.

Faith gives us the answer. Trust in God is powerful stuff. God's strength is perfected in our weakness. His power shines through our troubles when we give up on ourselves and trust Him instead. Then His Word carries remarkable power! It doesn't magically make our troubles go away, but, through His Word, God strengthens us to be equal to the obstacles, challenges, and dangers that we confront. He might even use them for His glorious purposes. Eventually the troubles of life will go away, or God will take them away, or He will take us away out of all of them, but while we struggle, He is there to strengthen us, protects us, and bring us through. So our hope is in Him.

Furthermore, we are the ones who are to be like "God with skin on" to our brothers and sisters in Christ. God has given us to each other to encourage and comfort one another, to hold our hands in times when we need that, and to help us bear the load. We work for one another. We feed one another. We sympathise, and weep with, and rejoice with, and confess the faith with one another. We do it out of love - not obligation. That is why the last verse of our text says, ¹¹ **Therefore, encourage each other and build one another up, as in fact you are doing!**

Then, while we stand protected by faith and encouraged by our love one another, we have the helmet of the hope of salvation: ⁹ **For God has not appointed us to His wrath, but to gain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.** ¹⁰ **He has died for us, so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him.** As we get closer to the end of the church year, we face the end of the world. It is a sombre and serious topic. But it is not a cause for fear for us. God is with us every step of the way, and we know that the end of the world is not the end. Of the world, yes, but not for us. God has destined us for salvation! Whether we live, which Paul refers to here as "**awake,**" or we have passed on, which Paul calls "**sleep,**" we are with the Lord, and our hope is sure and we will live forever. So, for us, the end of this life and the end of this world are, like the end of the church year, part of the

plan of God. They are a cause for remembering God's faithfulness and love, and encouraging one another to hold fast and be faithful and never lose hope.

We know that it is not death to die - and while we live, we have God's help, comfort and strength, and so we prepare. We live as His holy people and we encourage one another, and we share the good news of Jesus and of forgiveness and of salvation. We don't hide, and we don't run, and we don't try to blind ourselves with the intoxications of this world. ⁷ **For people who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night.** ⁸ **However, let us, who live in the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and the hope of salvation as a helmet!** ⁹ **For God has not appointed us to His wrath, but to gain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.** ¹⁰ **He has died for us, so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him.** ¹¹ **Therefore, encourage each other and build one another up, as in fact you are doing!** Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Almighty and most merciful heavenly Father, You have created all things by Your powerful word. You decide the history of every nation, and direct the life of every human being. We acknowledge Your rule over all things, but we come confidently before You with our prayer and praise, because You are our loving Father in Jesus Christ.

We thank You for the plenteous daily blessings that You graciously give us. You send rain; the fields are filled with flocks; and the ground produces a rich harvest of food. You make the earth rich and fertile, and bless our labour. We praise You that You open Your hand, and satisfy the needs of Your whole creation.

But we thank You above all for the wonderful gift of Your Son Jesus Christ. We thank You that His obedience has covered our failure to obey Your commandments to love You and our neighbour perfectly. Through His death we have been set free from the slavery of sin and death, and through His resurrection we have been made citizens of heaven. You have given us the sure hope of the resurrection of our bodies. You have promised that when our Lord

returns He will change our weak, mortal bodies and make them glorious like His own. Grant that, as we live out our earthly lives, we may wait eagerly for His coming, to liberate us from this imperfect world and to give us the perfection of heaven. Give us power through this hope to purify our lives and to set our hearts on things above.

Send forth Your Word into all the world. Help Christian people everywhere to rejoice in Your truth and to sing of Your love, so that Your ways may be known by all people and Your salvation received everywhere with joy.

Pour out Your blessing on our country. Grant that all who make and administer our laws may honour and fear You. Guide them by Your wisdom, so that justice, mercy, righteousness, and peace may flourish, and all evil and violence be suppressed. Give all citizens of this country an obedient spirit; lead them to respect their leaders.

Keep Your Church alive through the power of the Gospel. Fill it with Your Spirit so that it may serve You with a cheerful and sacrificial love. Grant that all Your people may follow the example of those who are leaders in the new life of the Spirit. Teach the youth of the Church to consider everything else inferior compared with knowing Christ as their Saviour and Lord. Help all our baptised children to love and follow Jesus Christ with joy and gladness.

Give a quiet confidence to all who are troubled in body, mind, or spirit. Grant them a strong faith in Your compassion, and ardent hope. Be with the sick, and remind them of Your ever-abiding presence.

We pray for our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ from Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Forsythe, Illinois. While it has pleased You to call Matthew Schmidt, a pastor to Your people, into Your glorious presence, we ask You to comfort all who mourn his departure, and help them to gratefully remember all who have spoken the Word of God to them.

In this world without God and without hope, grant that we may be watchful for the return of the great God, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Grant that we may see with our own eyes His glory on Your throne as David's lord and King of kings. This we ask in the name and for the sake of Him who is our Saviour, Lord, and King for ever. Amen.

24th Sunday after Pentecost

Zephaniah 1:7-16

⁷ Be silent in the presence of the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near. For the LORD has prepared a sacrifice. He has declared holy those whom He has invited.

⁸ “On the day of the sacrifice of the LORD I shall punish the princes, the king’s sons, and all who dress in foreign clothing. ⁹ On that day I shall punish everyone who jumps over the threshold, and all who fill their masters’ houses with violence and deception.

¹⁰ “On that day,” declares the LORD, “a loud screaming will come from the Fish-Gate, a howling from the Second Quarter, and a loud crash from the hills. ¹¹ Howl, you who live in Maktesh! For all the merchant people will be destroyed. All who weigh out silver will be exterminated. ¹² At that time I shall search Jerusalem with lamps, and I shall punish the men who are becoming thick on their dregs of wine, those who are thinking, ‘The LORD will not do anything good or do anything evil.’

¹³ Their wealth will be plundered, and their houses will become a sinister desolation. Although they

build houses, they will not live in them. Although they plant vineyards, they will not drink their wine.”

¹⁴ The great day of the LORD is near. It is near and coming very quickly. Listen! The day of the LORD will be bitter. There the warrior will scream for help. ¹⁵ That day will be a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, ¹⁶ a day of trumpet-blowing and battle cries against the fortified cities and against the high corner-towers.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

¹ Fellow-Christians, you do not need us to write to you about times and dates, ² because you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord is coming like a thief in the night. ³ When people are saying, “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come on them suddenly like labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will certainly not escape. ⁴ You, however, fellow-Christians, are not in darkness, that this day should overtake you like a thief. ⁵ For you are all children of the light and

children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to darkness.⁶ Therefore let us not sleep, like the rest, but let us keep awake and be sober!⁷ For people who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night.⁸ However, let us, who live in the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and the hope of salvation as a helmet!⁹ For God has not appointed us to His wrath, but to gain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁰ He has died for us, so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him.¹¹ Therefore, encourage each other and build one another up, as in fact you are doing!

Matthew 25:14-30

¹⁴ “For it is like a man going on a journey. He called his servants and entrusted his property to them.¹⁵ He gave one man five talents, another two talents, and another one talent, each according to his ability; and he immediately went on his journey.¹⁶ The one who had received the five talents went and put them to work and gained five more.¹⁷ In the same way the one who had received the two talents gained two more.¹⁸ However, the

one who had received the one talent went away, dug in the ground, and hid his master’s money.¹⁹ After a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.²⁰ The one who had received the five talents came and brought five more talents. He said, ‘Master, you entrusted five talents to me. Look! I have gained five more talents.’

²¹ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things. I shall put you in charge of many things. Enter into your master’s joy!’

²² “The one who had received the two talents came and said, ‘Master, you entrusted two talents to me. Look! I have gained two more talents.’

²³ “His master told him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things. I shall put you in charge of many things. Enter into your master’s joy!’

²⁴ “When the one who had received the one talent also came, he said, ‘Master, I knew that you were a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown, and gathering from where you have not scattered.²⁵ I

was afraid. So I went away and hid your talent in the ground. Look! Here you have what is yours.’

²⁶ “His master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy servant! So did you know that I harvest where I have not sown, and gather from where I have not scattered?’ ²⁷ Therefore you should have deposited my money with the bankers; and, when I returned, I would have received my own back

with interest. ²⁸ Therefore take the talent away from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents! ²⁹ For everyone who has something will be given more, and he will have plenty. However, he who has nothing will have even what he has taken away from him. ³⁰ So throw the useless servant out into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!’”