

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

¹ Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters,[a] you do not need to have anything written to you. ² For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! ⁴ But you, beloved,[b] are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; ⁵ for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. ⁶ So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; ⁷ for those who sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹ For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

I love to drive. If I have the choice between flying somewhere or driving somewhere, I prefer to drive, not because I am afraid to fly, but just because I enjoy driving.

However, this is the time of year I least like driving home from work. It's dark for most of my drive home, and I don't feel relaxed when I drive in the dark. I am bothered by the oncoming car lights; they are bright, and they blind me. I feel even more trepidation when it's foggy or raining and it's dark.

Add to that, during this season of the year, the deer trying to cross the road in pursuit of a mate. It's stressful enough keeping an eye out for deer in the daylight; it's much worse in the dark. I remember one evening on my way home from Fahrney-Keedy, I was behind a car on a dark and rainy ride on Route 15. One moment I was following a car and the next moment I was on the tail of a running deer. I don't know how the car in front of me or how I missed hitting the deer. One moment it wasn't there, and the very next moment it was dangerously close to getting hit by us.

The key to safely driving through the nasty weather conditions I just mentioned and avoiding the unexpected is to slow down and to diligently keep your eyes on the road and on your surroundings. And if you have fog lights, as I do now, turn them on.

Like driving, a Christian can experience anxious moments when walking down the road of faith. Like driving through rain or snow and ice, the road can be slick and impassable, and sometimes the unexpected can get in your path. But the Apostle Paul tells us through today's text that we don't need to be anxious or panic. Christians have everything they need to see clearly and find their way down the road of faith.

One of the roadblocks some Christians run into is their obsession with the second coming of Christ. In the lectionary text we reflected on last week, we saw this same issue was a problem for the Jews in Matthew's day, as it apparently was for the church in Thessalonica whom the apostle Paul was writing to in today's text. This topic for Christians seems to arise again and again throughout history especially when the times being lived through seem particularly dark, and evil driven.

As I pointed out last week, there are those today who try to figure out when Jesus will return by studying and interpreting the scriptures to discover signs for his return. Why? Really, the question is why? Is it so they can be ready at the exact moment in time of Christ's return?

Being ready— what does that entail? Think about that. Are they planning to live it up in sin until the absolute last moment before Jesus returns?

The Danish philosopher, Kierkegaard, tells a parable of a theater where a variety show is proceeding. Each show is more fantastic than the last and is applauded by the audience. Suddenly the manager comes forward. He apologizes for the interruption, but the theater is on fire, and he begs his patrons to leave in an orderly fashion. The audience thinks this is the most amusing turn of the evening and cheer thunderously. The manager again implores them to leave the burning building, and he is again applauded vigorously. At last he can do no more. The fire raced through the whole building and the fun-loving audience with it. "And so," concluded Kierkegaard, "will our age, I sometimes think, go down in fiery destruction to the applause of a crowded house of cheering spectators." Like fire, Christ's return needs to be taken seriously every day and not just if we think it is imminent.

Having said that, worrying about the second coming of Christ does not make sense to me. Paul didn't understand it either. He tells the believers that we will never, ever know the time when Jesus will return for us. It's not something we can put on our calendars. He will come when we least expect it. Realizing and accepting this truth will help us to keep from falling into complacency with our faithfulness and relationship with God.

Paul reminds us that we already have everything we need to be ready for the moment Christ comes for us, and here is the important point to remember—**whether he comes for us when our individual day arrives for us to leave this world**, meaning when we die, or if he comes on some promised day of his return at the end times. We don't want to be caught with our faith sleeping whenever he comes for us.

A resident in a seaside hotel breakfast room called over the head waiter one morning and said, "I want two boiled eggs, one of them so undercooked it's runny, and the other so overcooked, it's about as easy to eat as rubber; also grilled bacon that has been left on the plate to get cold; burnt toast that crumbles away as soon as you touch it with a knife; butter straight from the deep-freeze so that it's impossible to spread; and a pot of very weak coffee, lukewarm."

"That's a complicated order sir," said the bewildered waiter. "It might be a bit difficult."

The guest replied, "Oh, but that's what you gave me yesterday!"

The chef in this story had everything he needed to make a delicious breakfast for his customers; however, he didn't seem to care about cooking the food correctly and failed at pleasing this customer. Likewise, we have everything we need to be ready for the moment when we are taken home to be with our Heavenly Father.

It has never been God's plan to set us up for failure; we can make that happen all on our own. It began with Adam and Eve making the decision to disobey God. We do the same thing every day. We all make bad choices and ignore God sometimes. So, God sent his beloved Son to save us. Because of this incredible gift, we definitely have everything we need to walk through the darkness and back into the light of Christ.

We have God's grace and mercy to forgive us and wash away all of the sin that separates us from God. All we need to do is confess. We have God's Word, like a light, that guides us through the darkness of sin that seeks to overtake us. And we have the Holy Spirit within us to cheer us on and to carry us when pain, depression, or desperation becomes overwhelming. It's the Holy Spirit that speaks our prayers when we can't find the words to pray.

God also gives us each other. We have a responsibility to one another. We need each other. We can be like a fog light for one another when the road is hard to see. We can help one another keep from colliding with God's will. We can hold each other up when our patience is

thin, and we want immediate resolutions to the difficulties we encounter. We can sit with one another when there don't seem to be any answers to our questions of "Why? When? How?" that we may ask God. We can be that loving presence of Christ to each other when we feel our prayers go unanswered and we feel abandoned by God. We need each other.

I found this poignant little saying about nurturing healthy relationships. Listen closely. On Getting Along With People, The SIX most important words are "I admit I made a mistake." The FIVE most important words: "You did a good job." The FOUR most important words: "What do you think?" The THREE most important words: "After you please." The TWO most important words: "Thank you." The ONE most important word: "We" The LEAST important word: "I"

It is all a part of God's plan that we have each other so we don't fail and so we are prepared for that day when Christ returns for us. That is why it is so important that we take care of our relationships with each other. We need to forgive when we feel we have been wronged. We should take the time to get to know one another. We need to listen, really listen, to the words and the body language of one another.

Listen to Paul's words, "God didn't set us up for an angry rejection but for salvation by our Master, Jesus Christ. He died for us, a death that triggered life. Whether we're awake with the living or asleep with the dead, we're alive with him! So, speak encouraging words to one another. Build up hope so you'll all be together in this, no one left out, no one left behind."

Together, with courage and support, we turn on our fog lights, the light of Jesus within us, and make that trip down the road of life until Christ returns for us. Hallelujah! Amen.