

Pastor T.C. Arnold
The Last Sunday in the Church Year
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11
November 21st, 2010

The Church Year takes us places. Today we end a journey. This is the Last Sunday of the Church Year. Advent is next Sunday and a new season begins. That season will take us places. It will take us to the brink of Bethlehem and also to the gates of heaven. Then we have Christmas and with that we are taken to a baby in the manger. Then during Epiphany we are taken to the many places Jesus is made known to the world as the Lord. Then during Lent we are taken to Mt. Calvary as we prepare with somberness for the crucifixion of Jesus. Then the resurrection is celebrated and we are taken to empty tomb where the angels say “He is not here, He is risen just as He said.”

Then, after being taken to and fro by the life of our Savior, we move on into the more general time of the Church Year – the Trinity Season. Today is that last day of the Trinity Season – the last day of the entire Church Year. And with this day, just like before, the Church Year takes us places. Today, we are taken to a promise yet to come. Today we are taken to the Word of God as we remember that our Lord will come again to judge both the living and the dead. Today, in the faith of Christ, we are taken to heaven.

But heaven is not the place many people think of when we talk about judgment day or “The Day of our Lord.” For example, in the Old Testament the conception of the Day of the Lord is very common but not favorable. It’s helpful to understand that to the Jew all time was divided into two ages. There was the present age, which was wholly and incurably bad. There was the age to come which would be the golden age of God in the time to come. But in between there was the Day of the Lord. That day would be a very terrible day. For example, in Isaiah 22:5 it says, “*For the Lord God of hosts has a day of tumult and trampling and confusion in the valley of vision a battering down of walls and a shouting to the mountains.*” Earlier in chapter 13 Isaiah writes, “*Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it.*” This doesn’t sound nice.

With all this chaos in mind, we do well to remember that men like St. Paul – the New Testament writers – associated our Lord’s coming again with this Day of the Lord. This makes many of us uneasy. This sounds scary. This makes us anxious. If the Church Year today takes us places, then where is the Lord taking us on this Last Day?

Perhaps because of all the uncertainty that seems to surround the coming of our Lord to judge both the living and dead (as we confess in the Creed) it would cause us to be anxious to know when that day would come. We want to know so that we can be prepared. Perhaps the reason we would like to know is because we feel as if today we don’t have our lives and our homes in order – but if we knew – we could change things right before He comes. We could be ready.

Jesus told us in the Gospels that no one knew when that day or hour would be, that even He did not know, that only the Heavenly Father knew. But that did not stop people from speculating about it, as indeed we still do today. You have heard the predictions. The world does not know when – says the Bible.

So, what do we know? We know that the Lord will come suddenly and unexpectedly. The last day will come like a thief in the night. But even as the last day will come in this way, there is no reason that we as Christians should be caught unawares and unprepared. We know He is coming. We just don’t know when. For that reason, we live each day of our life as if this is the day our Lord is coming. This type of living Paul calls “*living as children of the light.*” This describes how Christians are to live – as people of the day.

But we often don't live like this. Even though our Lord loves us so much that He would give His only begotten Son for us – so that He might die for us – we, in our actions, don't live like children of the light. In fact, there are times we live like people of the dark. We live “in” the dark and we prefer to live that way.

Parents, how many times have we wanted to remain “in the dark” regarding what our children are doing, are saying, are texting, are posting on Facebook? We say, “It's better that I don't know.” Is it? It may be better for you but is it better for your children? How many times have we turned away from our Lord's instruction on how we are to act and think to ourselves, “I had a reason for doing it. I know it's wrong but I'm going to do it anyway. Only I will know. The Lord will just have to understand.” And even when we do know and understand the Lord's good and perfect law, we try not to think too much about how that law applies to me – because if I do – then I will see myself for what I am – a poor miserable sinner. And I'm not that bad.

But you are. You are a child of the light, like the text for today says, who sometimes lives like a child of the dark. Darkness, you see, is the absence of the light of Christ who shows us the way the truth and the life. And even though we belong to the Lord and are very precious to Him, we still have a dark side. It's called sin. And that describes all of us. That makes you no better than your neighbor. Sin makes you no better of a person in standing before the judgment seat as the chief of sinners you are comparing your life to at this very moment.

Remember how the Day of the Lord back in the Old Testament is described as a day of tumult, confusion, desolation and destruction – according to Isaiah the prophet? For this reason, and because of the many reasons you have heard about from T.V. preachers, Discovery Channel documentaries, and quite frankly what is popular today, we fear the last day. If we live in darkness – that is – without the light of Christ, the Day of the Lord is to be feared. But if we live in the light, then we have nothing to fear and everything to look forward to.

Beloved in the Lord, you are children of the light. Live like children of the light. Live like Jesus is coming. Because, beloved in the Lord, He is. We don't know when. We know it will be suddenly and unexpectedly. But we will not be caught unawares and unprepared. The reason is because you know. You know why you are here this morning. You know what the Savior has done for you and the promises that He keeps. You know – and if you don't know – you are the one our Lord has inscribed in the book of life. The Lord is taking you places. That might not be today – that might not be in your job. That might not be in terms of your personal happiness right now. But He is taking you places. You are going places. And the place we are going is much better than any job or happy place we could possibly find on this side of eternity.

When we look at the condition of this world today it leaves us saying things like, “Lord, how much longer?” The answer, “you need not know the day or the hour when the Son of man returns,” our Savior proclaims. All we need to know is that He is coming and that according to His good and gracious promise, He is taking us places.

So what do we do? We live like He is coming today – always ready and always prepared. In Christ heaven awaits. Amen.

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