

Pastor T.C. Arnold
The Last Sunday in the Church Year
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11
November 26th, 2017

Please allow me to begin this morning with some sobering facts. Sometimes we lose perspective about our family members, our neighbors, our friends, and even ourselves when it comes to depression and anxiety, an epidemic in our modern world.

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, anxiety disorders affect more than 40 million people in the United States. Anxiety disorders are highly treatable but only about 36% of those who suffer receive treatment. General Anxiety Disorder affects about 6.8 million adults. Panic Disorder affects about 6 million adults. Social Anxiety Disorders about 15 million. And that's only the beginning. We haven't even talked about specific phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorder, PTSD, or major depressive disorder... And I just gave you the statistics for adults. Add in our children and those numbers continue to climb.

Americans fear admitting such conditions because they don't want to seem weak, fragile, unable to have meaningful relationships, or even be considered unemployable. Just think, in my field as a clergyman, what do you think people would say if they found out that their pastor was clinically depressed? Would a pastor like that ever get a call to a congregation? How can he help others when he needs so much help himself? So people hide their anxiety and their depression.

Today is that last day of the Trinity Season – the last day of the entire Church Year. And, on a day like today, the message may make us anxious. Today, we talk about the end. 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. That's enough to scare any of us.

Fear may grip those who fear the end. And yet judgment day is called, "The Day of our Lord." Still, thoughts of the end make us anxious. Back in the Old Testament the conception of "The Day of the Lord" was very common but not favorable. It's helpful to understand that to the Jews 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 says in chapter 13, "*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. Words like this in the Bible make us anxious.

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 "The Day of the Lord." This makes many of us uneasy. This sounds scary.

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 social media? 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 what I did. 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.

And so when St. Paul says, "*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request's be made known to God,*"... we go to our heavenly Father with our fears, with our needs, and our desires. And we can go to Him knowing that in Christ, our sins are forgiven in these anxious times. We have the confidence that heaven is ours by virtue of our Savior. "The Day of the Lord" is a blessed day, not an anxious day. So in these anxious times, have no doubt about this one, beloved in the Lord. You are His. You are forgiven and saved.

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. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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