

## Sermon Draft

**Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18**

**Sermon: “Comfort and Encouragement”**

It is that time of the Church Year, as our Christian, liturgical journey comes to an end with these final Sundays after Pentecost. For some these final Sundays are either missed or their focus is already on the family’s Thanksgiving dinner or perhaps even the next season of the Church Year, Advent, with Christmas decorations, trees, and children’s programs. And this year with the pandemic our plans don’t look like they usually would.

But as we focus on these last Sundays in the Church Year are we truly prepared for Jesus’ second coming? Do we even know what will take place when our Lord does return? We pray, **“Thy kingdom come.”** We sing with the psalmist, **“Make haste, O God, to deliver me! O Lord, make haste to help me!”** (Psalm; Ps 70:1). Our liturgy not only directs our attention to the end times but also reveals what is in store for Christians.

***“How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! . . . For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness”*** (Introit, Psalm 84:1, 10).

Could anyone use some words of encouragement this morning? It has been a rough year and it's not over yet. When someone comforts us or gives us support and confidence, even a glimmer of hope, one's day, attitude, and outlook on life can positively change in seconds.

Well, Paul really has some words of encouragement, words that can only give true comfort, confidence, and everlasting hope. And those words deal with the coming of the Lord and the sequence of events concerning the bodily resurrection of believers.

Some Thessalonian Christians were deeply concerned that believers who died before Christ's return would somehow lose out. Certainly, this was not the case!

Paul teaches these readers in the verses before our text concerning the sanctified life, dealing with sexual matters, and Christian love and living, he now continues to address them on this troubling matter not wanting them to remain uninformed, ignorant of the facts.

We know it's hard enough even for us Christians to say those earthly goodbyes to people we deeply love. So, could you imagine these Thessalonian Christians who thought their loved ones who died, who were also believers, would miss out on Christ's glorious return not being with angels, archangels, and the whole company of heaven? Well, Paul gives them detailed information so that they don't grieve like the pagan world or those who live without Christ, living without the hope of the resurrection and everlasting life.

It's sad to say that so many to this very day are still uninformed of the encouragement Paul was offering two thousand years ago. In fact over the years I've had opportunity to answer many questions not only concerning the events of Christ's return.

But I've also dealt with questions about our own resurrections even though we confess that weekly in our creeds: "and I look for the resurrection of the dead" (Nicene Creed) and "the resurrection of the body" (Apostles' Creed).

So, before Paul listed those detailed events of what will happen when Christ returns, he not only reminded his readers, including you and me, but also taught us the life-giving importance of Christ's death and resurrection. Hence, he wrote: ***"For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep"*** (v 14).

Before God could raise us to life in heaven, Christ had to die and rise again for without his bodily resurrection, there would be no hope; dust and ash would be our future, and death would be the final outcome for our souls and bodies due to our sin. This, then, is precisely what God teaches us first through his Word. The Scriptures clearly teach that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day and appeared bodily to his disciples.

Luke writes, ***“God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead”*** (Acts 10:40–41) and ***“he presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God”*** (Acts 1:3).

Because of Jesus’ bodily resurrection, we now have such a comforting testimony for our own futures! First of all, Jesus is the Son of God, as Paul declared: ***“[He] was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord”*** (Rom 1:4). Second, his teaching is true, as John wrote: ***“Jesus answered, . . . ‘For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice’”*** (John 18:37). Our next comforting testimony is the fact that our heavenly Father has accepted Christ’s sacrifice for the reconciliation of the world, as Paul declares:

***“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life”*** (Romans 5:10). And finally, what comfort it is to know that all who believe in Christ will rise to eternal life, as Jesus said to Martha at the death of her brother Lazarus: ***“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die”*** (John 11:25–26); and to his apostles: ***“Because I live, you also will live”*** (John 14:19). Paul adds, ***“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ”*** (1 Corinthians 15:22–23).

And yet, the comfort that Jesus reveals, brings, and gives does not stop here but continues! Yes, there is an order of events when our Lord returns: Those ***“who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God.***

***And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord”***

(1 Thessalonians 4:15–17).

What encouraging words, words of hope and words of everlasting life for all who believe in Jesus’ death and resurrection, we will always be with the Lord! Just think of that. When our living Lord returns, when he comes once again, with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of his trumpet, it will be such a joyous event!

What we, the Church, have been praying and singing throughout the years ***“Thy kingdom come”***; “that with all the company of the redeemed we may finally enter into his eternal wedding feast”; “Glory be to God on high”; “with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven”; and “Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth” will finally be for you and me a full reality.

Paul encourages us in our text, ***“we will always be with the Lord”*** (v 17), our souls and our resurrected bodies, with no more sin, death, or the power of Satan. Yes, indeed, we will never ever be separated from our Lord!

That is why Paul not only told his original readers to ***“encourage one another with these words”*** (v 18), but, through God the Holy Spirit, he also had us in mind when he penned those same words. Christ will not delay. He will come swiftly to bring us to heaven, to himself.

Therefore, thanks be to God, that by his grace we are enabled to know, confess, and proclaim to others the outcome of those who “sleep” and live in Jesus: We will always be with the Lord!

What wonderful words of encouragement words of confidence, hope, and joy, words of eternal life, because of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

All glory be to God!

Amen.