

Sermon Draft

Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11

Sermon: “From Darkness to Light”

With one more Sunday in the Church Year, we look forward even more intently to not just the Advent and Christmas seasons, but to the never-ending season of heaven. We look forward with excitement; this time of waiting is no time for complacency! The Old Testament Reading: ***“At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are complacent, those who say in their hearts, ‘The Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill.’ Their goods shall be plundered, and their houses laid waste.” The Lord will do something, something spectacular: “The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast”*** (Zephaniah 1:12–13a, 14a). Evil, all evil, will not only be punished, but be removed.

Our Psalm reminds us we simply do not have enough time to be complacent; we may live seventy or eighty years, but those are soon gone. And the Gospel makes it very clear that we cannot just “bury” the talents God has given us but are to use them honorably, for there will be a reckoning (Matthew 25:24–30).

While we await Christ's return, knowing he comes with salvation, we are active, living out our faith, as children not of darkness, but of light (1 Thessalonians 5:4–9). How timely a reminder as we prepare to conduct our annual voter's meeting and elect servants for the new year. A reminder for each of us how God calls us and gives us or lends us our time, talents, and treasures to use to do His Kingdom work. It's also a good reminder that it's not about anyone of us. It is all about using God's gifts to do His work and giving Him all glory, honor, and praise.

For sure this year has been a rough one but that has not stopped all those people out there who think it's necessary to predict the future. Just about all of them have been wrong. I don't know of anyone who predicted this pandemic. But people have been predicting things for as long as we can remember. Every few years someone will try and predict when the world will end. Some even go so far as to predict the month and day that time will end and Jesus will come for his second advent and they will always be wrong.

Just why is it that some feel the need to try to make such predictions? After all, most of these predictors fall into the general realm of Christianity, even if rather unsound in some of their doctrines. It might well be summarized by one word of our text: “darkness.” For some of them, it might not be total darkness, but it certainly is a near-dark setting in which they live spiritually.

St. Paul writes our text today to reassure us that we don’t live in this kind of darkness. Instead, for us who believe in Jesus, because of Christ, the darkness of sin and death is gone.

The concepts of light and dark are used rather often in Scripture, and it is no surprise, then, that Paul would continue with that imagery. Just what is it that is meant with the usage of darkness and light? Very simply, it means that those of the light are those with faith and those of the darkness are unbelievers. Knowing that, so much makes sense as to why those words are used to illustrate faith or lack of faith. Let’s look at it this way. In the dark, not only can’t we see where we are going; we can’t see danger, danger either in our path or coming toward us.

We simply do not know much about what's out in front or surrounding us. On the other hand, in the daytime, all can be seen. There is no question about the path on which we walk. And if danger comes, we can see it and make moves to avoid it. Indeed, in the light, we can have great confidence about about where we are going, and where we will end up.

So, with faith, it is as though all confidence has been given. We know who we are and where we are going, and where we will end up. Faith in Christ, the faith God so graciously gives in Baptism, allows us to know, without any doubt that we belong to God. Faith in Christ allows us to know that the path we walk in life is a God-given path, walking in the manner of Jesus serving others, serving the church, honoring God in all we do. Faith in Christ allows us to know, with absolute certainty, that we will be with Jesus in the glory of glories when this life is over. This is most certainly being in the light!

But in the darkness, it is the absolute opposite. St. Paul warns, ***“The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, ‘There is peace and security,’ then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape”*** (vs 2b–3).

The only certainty in darkness is uncertainty. One may deceive himself that there is some certainty, but if one in darkness can actually be honest, he must admit there’s none. Oh, yes, we could say that there will certainly be death. But even that doesn’t answer the question about what happens after one dies.

Indeed, this is the reason for Paul writing the words of our passage for this morning, to give greater certainty to the believers of Thessalonica. He writes, ***“Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night”*** (vs 1–2).

When Paul begins this segment with the words, “times and seasons,” he’s adding information to the previous segment, word we heard last week in which he describes the future glory for those who believe in the Christ:

“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” (4:16–17).

Now Paul is addressing the normal inquisitive nature of wondering when that glory will come. He addresses this question for two primary reasons, both addressing the sins normally committed in this arena. One is that our sinful nature just does not want to trust without having some concrete evidence. We want the Lord to give us some specifics so that we can plan accordingly, or so we might say.

If we know the specifics, then, it diminishes our need to have faith in the words of Scripture, our need to trust in God’s perfect providence for our future, or even our need to trust in what God did in Christ to save us. Thus, if we know the day and time, we could say, in a sense, that faith isn’t really required.

The second reason for Paul addressing this question about the day and time of the return of Christ is that if we knew, then we'd think we could live however we want until then and clean up our act just before Jesus' arrival, should that actually be possible. But Paul knows that ploy: ***“Let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night”*** (vs 6–7).

Now, it may well be that we each are thinking at this moment that that is not what I would do if I knew the day and time of Jesus' return. We want to say strongly, “I will not quit trusting in what God has done for me, and I will not, by any means, stop living my life to the honor of God in everything I do.” It's wonderful to think that. But deep down we know that our real tendency is to think and do that which pleases self and not God. We make excuses to avoid caring for others or helping when the need arises. Indeed, this tendency is something that crops up rather routinely, and it's certainly a tendency we each have to fight with regularly.

In fact, that is one of the prime reasons why Jesus gave his life to forgive all our sin, of course, but specifically, especially, the sins to stop trusting and to live in a less-than-honorable manner.

So, we really have to say that it is a great gift not to know, not to know the day or the time or the season when Jesus will come again. You see, what we do know is quite enough: ***“Concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. . . . You are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness”*** (vs 1, 4–5). By not knowing, we then focus on what really counts; that we believe and believe with all our hearts that God has made us children of the light. He did so by buying us back from the clutches of Satan and our sin: ***“For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him”*** (vs 9–10).

And God made us children of this wonderful future by giving us faith through the Word in our Baptism and in our ears. We really are his very own children, and for all eternity.

The other thing that really counts is that without having to keep looking toward some day or date or season in the future, we can just let Christ live in us and us in Him. By letting that be the truth of our lives, those around us will see us as significantly different from those who live without the light:

“Since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. . . . Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing” (vs 8, 11). Being children of the light changes altogether what life is and what life is all about. We no longer live for self, but for the Christ who saved us and for the people with whom we are to share God’s love. That is the sum and substance of being no longer of the darkness, but being children of the light, being children of the heavenly Father. By not being of the darkness, by being children of the light, we belong, truly belong, to God the Father, God Almighty.

He has removed all the sins we have and ever will commit. And as He now lives in us we become lights to the world around us. If it were not for believers in the world, it would indeed be the dark ages all over again.

Praise God for having come to us to make us his children of light. Praise God for living in and through us, making us alert and sober about this life and knowledgeable about what is to come in the next life. Yes, we have so much for which to praise God. And we have so much to do as His children who are His hands, voice and feet until He returns. All praise and thanks be to God.

Amen