

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When they say, ‘There is peace and security’, then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then, let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; for those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. 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. For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Sermon

This letter to the church in Thessalonica was written during an odd and disconcerting time in the life of the church. Most of the people of this church were probably alive when Jesus promised that he would come again, to give them life eternal. And now, time was passing, and some of their members were beginning to die. And still, they found themselves waiting, and waiting, and waiting. Much longer than they had originally planned for. Much longer than they wanted. Longer, even, than they thought they could endure.

We too find ourselves in a time of waiting. As we bide our time until this pandemic is over.

And something I’ve noticed about our waiting is that there is a Temptation to just press pause:

- To power down our lives and put our work on hold until we can “get back to normal”
- There’s a temptation, like the church in Thessalonica must have felt, to go to sleep, and let ourselves become blissfully unaware of all that is happening in the world, like a bear that hibernates until spring returns.
- There’s a temptation to numb ourselves so that we don’t feel all the worry about whether or not God will fulfill God’s promises. So, whether we administer the numbing with drink and drugs, or we simply turn off the news or turn a cold shoulder to the needs of our neighbors in an effort to avoid feeling the pain we share with the world. There’s been a temptation to just press pause until the darkness passes and the day comes once again.

And that temptation might grow ever stronger as we see another spike in Coronavirus cases. As we get notices of schools shifting back to remote learning. As our favorite restaurants close. That temptation to just press pause and give up on our work might creep in as we start to struggle with the idea of having to cancel our plans and adapt our traditions in the approaching holiday season.

But remember, no matter how long we have sat in the darkness. No matter how hard it is to imagine the sun rising again. We were born to be children of the light.

Now, this doesn’t mean that we should just close our eyes to the darkness and pretend that it is light. When the Apostle Paul writes this letter to the church in Thessalonica, that was tired of

waiting for Jesus to come, he doesn't tell them to deny the difficult reality in which they live and just go on about their business as if everything was normal and the sun was bright as day.

- No, instead, he calls on them to remember, that Jesus Christ had also promised he would come, "like a thief in the night."
- He will come when they least expected, in ways they could not imagine.
- He will come to surprise them, just when they need him most.
- He will break in through the windows and find ways to sneak in past the doors that we put up against the dangers of the night, and shine his light upon them.

And it makes me wonder, if we are called to be followers of Jesus, well then, perhaps our work in the midst of the darkness is not to go to sleep, is not to have a drink and hope that it will be daytime soon. Not to wait to do our work later, or hope that someone else will do it for us. But, perhaps our work is to find ways to be a bit more like this "thief in the night."

- To work in the darkness
- To sneak joy into the sadness
- To smuggle hope to the hopeless
- To bake a pie and leave it outside the doors of our neighbors who can't travel to see their parents.
- To hold babies up to the windows of people who can't safely let their grandchildren inside the house.
- To make plans to use telephones and video cameras and all our God given creativity to share our Thanksgiving blessings and our Christmas cheer in the midst of the long night that is this pandemic.
- To send greeting cards and notes in the mail to the people we know might be feeling alone.
- To offer to babysit for frontline workers, who are overwhelmed with work and worry.
- To bring warm coats to the homeless who wait outside in the cold.
- To wave greetings to people who can't see your smile through your mask.
- To walk bravely into the darkness, and be the light.

For the work that God has given us cannot be put on pause because the way gets dark and difficult. But, God has given us an armor to wear that will get us through the night: A breastplate of faith and love, a helmet of hope in salvation. Let us put them on, and continue the work, of the children of the light - encouraging each other and building one another up, with creativity, energy, mercy and grace, as indeed you are doing. Amen.

This sermon was first shared with Aurora First Presbyterian Church, by Rev. Doug Friesema. To receive future communications from the church, please contact:

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