



## Christ Lutheran Church

605 South Fifth Street • Norfolk, NE 68701

**Share God's Word, share His love, and do it now!**

Pastor Chip Winter, Director of Ministries

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### ***“Living in the Light.” – 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11***

*24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – November 19, 2017*

**Pastor Chip Winter**

Grace to you and Peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. The text for our sermon is the epistle appointed for the day and already read for us from 1 Thessalonians, the first chapter.

My dear family in Christ, are there times for you when you do not have something completed or taken care of, when there are loose ends that just cannot be addressed right now – and you know this – but it drives you nuts? There is information missing or there are things out of your control, and you simply cannot stop thinking about and fretting over the unresolved issue or incomplete task. I think that's where the Thessalonians are right now.

St. Paul is assuring them that they really don't need to know any more about That Day which is coming, the Day to end all days. **“You'll be fine!”** the apostle assures them. But then St. Paul describes it coming **“like a thief in the night.”**

Really? It's coming like a thief in the night and I'm not supposed to worry about it? I want to know when that thief is coming so that I can be ready! I don't want to be sleeping and miss the intruder. I don't want to be caught unawares.

And that's a clue that it's the darkness that's the problem. One cannot see the thief approaching when you live in the darkness. And darkness, in St. Paul's usage, as well as St. John's, our Lord Jesus' and throughout Scripture, is the realm of sin and unbelief.

Did it take you some time as a child to get used to the darkness of your room when you went to sleep at night? Were the evening sounds of a settling house or an evening breeze really warning signs of who-knows-what-kind-of-evil lurking in the closet or under the dresser or bed?

Real darkness, Spiritual darkness, is different. How dark it was in Sutherland Springs, Texas, two Sundays ago. Shots rang out, bodies were damaged, lives were taken and a town was decimated. Darkness is frightening. Evil can be devastating.

How dark it is in a home where domestic abuse takes place. Cutting words, deliberate berating and manipulation. Slaps and blows. Darkness is frightening. Evil can be devastating.

But St. Paul reminds us that faith – faith in God, faith in our redemption through Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection – faith is the realm of light. Living in faith in Christ Jesus we live in the light. In that light, come what may and come when it may, we are destined not for wrath but to obtain salvation through our LORD's victory over sin, death and damnation.

Now, it's certainly a normal inquisitive nature that wants to know when that glory will come and St. Paul addresses this, too. As he does so, he addresses two sins normally committed in this area. ***(I)*** The first type of sin is that our sinful nature just doesn't want to trust without having some concrete evidence. We just want some specifics so that we can plan accordingly. But a demand for specifics in effect diminishes our need to have faith in God's Word to us, our need to trust in God's perfect providence for our future, or even our need to trust in what God has done in Christ Jesus to save us. Knowing the day and time would, in a sense, eliminate the requirement of faith.

(2) The second type of sin is found in this: if we knew the day and time of the return of our Savior, then we'd be able to convince ourselves that we could live however we want until that moment, just managing to clean up our acts in the seconds prior to Jesus' return – if that were indeed possible. But St. Paul knows that ploy. Sleeping and drinking, he notes, take place at night, in the darkness. We are called to stay awake, which is daylight activity.

Now it may well be that we each are thinking at this moment that such hedonistic cavorting is not what I would do if I knew the day and time of Jesus' return. We would want to say as strongly as possible **“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 when we think that. But you know, deep down, that our natural tendency is to think and do that which pleases ourselves and not God, to avoid caring for others and instead try to get out of it. Indeed, that tendency is something that crops up rather routinely, and it's certainly a tendency we each have to fight with regularity. Truth be told, it's the reason Jesus gave His life into death on the cross. He did this to forgive all of our sins, in which number we find those sins that stop trusting God and that move us to live less-than-honorable lives.

The wonderful transition that takes place, and of which St. Paul makes much, is that by not knowing the day and time of Christ Jesus' return we then can focus on what really counts. The first thing (*I*) that really counts is that we believe that God has made us children of the light, 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”** (9-10). God has called us to this existence through Baptism, working that faith in us which knows that we are God's children now and we will be such for all eternity.

The other thing (2) that really counts is that without having to keep looking toward some day, date or season in the future, we can be in the moment; we can just let Christ live in and through us. Indeed, 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 breast plate 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”** (v.8,11). Being children of the light changes altogether what life is and what life is about. One no longer lives for self, but for the Christ who saved us and for the people with whom we are to share God’s love.

Living in that light, we will not be caught unawares. Living in that light means that by faith we will always be ready for the Day of Judgment, we will be looking forward to the return of the One Who gave up His life and picked it back up again so that we might live in His righteousness for all eternity.

Readiness always involves practice. To be ready to play the game you practice in anticipation of it: you do drills, you build your endurance and strength. To be ready for the concert you practice in anticipation of it; you warm up with scales, you run through your parts. To be ready for the responsibilities of your calling, you prepare yourself as best you can in anticipation of the duties ahead; you study, you learn what you need to know.

To prepare for life with God in His kingdom new and glorious, the one that is on its way, we practice that life here and now; we live with God in this world. We live as His children now in anticipation of that great day.

There will still be those dark days in our country and around the world. If it were not for the believers in this world it would indeed be the dark ages all over.

But Jesus Christ is the light of the world, the light no darkness can overcome. He is the One Who has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. In His light we see light and we walk as children of the Light. In that walking, here and now, we are prepared for that day when the Risen Lord returns. Amen.