



23rd Sunday after Pentecost November 8, 2020

Introduction

Paul urges us to encourage one another with the promised coming of the Lord. Jesus tells the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids. Surrounded by the faithful of every time and place, we celebrate Christ's coming in our midst in the word of life and the feast of victory—the marriage feast of the lamb.

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity one God, Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit,
whose steadfast love is everlasting,
whose faithfulness endures from generation to generation. **Amen.**

Trusting in the mercy of God, let us confess our sin.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Reconciling God,

**we confess that we do not trust your abundance,
and we deny your presence in our lives.**

We place our hope in ourselves and rely on our own efforts.

We fail to believe that you provide enough for all.

We abuse your good creation for our own benefit.

We fear difference and do not welcome others as you have welcomed us.

We sin in thought, word, and deed.

**By your grace, forgive us; through your love, renew us;
and in your Spirit, lead us;**

so that we may live and serve you in newness of life. Amen.

Beloved of God,

by the radical abundance of divine mercy

we have peace with God through † Christ Jesus,
through whom we have obtained grace upon grace.

Our sins are forgiven. Let us live now in hope.

For hope does not disappoint,

because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Gathering Hymn ELW # 785 / LBW # 346

When Peace Like a River

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Prayer of the Day

O God of justice and love, you illumine our way through life with the words of your Son. Give us the light we need, and awaken us to the needs of others, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Psalmody: Psalm 70

¹Be pleased, O God, to deliver me; O LORD, make haste to help me.

²**Let those who seek my life be put to shame and confounded;
let those who take pleasure in my misfortune draw back and be disgraced.**

³Let those who say to me “Aha!” and gloat over me
turn back because of their shame.

⁴**Let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you;
let those who love your salvation say forever, “Great is the LORD!”**

⁵But as for me, I am poor and needy; come to me quickly, O God.
You are my helper and my deliverer; O LORD, do not tarry.

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Some of the Thessalonians are worried that dead Christians will be excluded from the resurrection to eternal life when Christ comes again. Paul reassures them with the word of hope that all Christians, living or dead, will be raised into everlasting life with Christ.

Read the text [here](#).

Gospel: Matthew 25:1-13

Jesus tells a parable about his own second coming, emphasizing the need for readiness at all times.

Read the text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

During the Wednesday night Bible Study, I mentioned that Faith, Hope, and Love had come up in some of our other scriptures and in Sunday School, and that we were going to spend the next three weeks of Bible Study discussing these. Last week, we talked about Faith, this coming week will be about Hope, and the last week will be about Love.

Hopelessness is something we hear about today. We are in the middle of a global pandemic, and some are giving up hope that we will have a vaccine. We are in the middle of political tensions and some are giving up hope. We are in the middle of worldwide economic issues, and some are giving up hope.

Hope is what Paul offers to us in this letter to the Thessalonians. He is certainly talking about other things – theological issues about the afterlife, but most of all, this pastoral letter speaks of hope.

Paul, trained as a Pharisee, believes in bodily resurrection. At the last day, God will raise all the dead in bodily form. This is Paul's theology about the afterlife, and he describes in this text how he believes it will happen – the dead will be raised and joined with those still alive and we will all be in the presence of Jesus. We can certainly talk about how this works, and when will it happen, but today I want to focus on the hope that Paul talks about.

In these days after the election, where not all votes are counted and not all races are decided, we wonder what is to happen. We need hope. We need something to cling to, rather than despair over politics.

Paul is clear in his thoughts to the Thessalonians. We are not to grieve, or even to worry, as those who have no hope. If we place our hope in earthly things, especially in human constructs such as our political system, we are always going to be disappointed. If our hope is in Christ, then we will never be disappointed.

Politicians come and go, as do most human inventions. Even governments come and go, as do those things that we believe are important. As we mature – both physically and spiritually, the things that we believe are important change. In fact, I would suggest that not only do our views change, but our belief that those views are all important changes as well. We begin to let the “little things” in life go and instead spend our energy on the bigger things – faith, hope and love.

Paul certainly admonishes the Thessalonians, and by extension, us, to take a different view. We will die, certainly, but we are not to fear death. We will grieve when others die, but we are not to grieve as those with no hope. We will worry over those things that happen in life, but we know there are more important things.

On that last day, Jesus will come and call us all to him with the sound of a trumpet. If we are alive, we will come to join him. If we are dead, we will be raised to come and join him. We will all be there, together, in the presence of Jesus, and all our worries will be gone. Knowing this, how can we worry so about the “little things” in life – and face it, they are all little things, knowing that our salvation is assured and that Jesus will come to be with us.

Paul also reminds us to not just have hope, but that we are to speak words of hope to one another. We are not to tear each other down; we are not to be discouraged; we are not to hate; we are to hope and to encourage one another.

In this day and time, those are the words we need to hear – faith, hope, and love. Our faith is in God; our hope is in Christ, and our love is for one another. Let us stop the spread of hate by spreading words of hope. Let us show our love for one another because our faith is in the Lord. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Hymn of the Day ELW # 596 / LBW # 293 *My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less*

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Apostles' Creed

We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord.

**who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

Longing for Christ's reign to come among us, we pray for the outpouring of God's power on the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

Holy God, rouse us to deep praise as we gather for worship either virtually or in person. Help us to feel your presence. Sustain the work of all church musicians who lead us in praise and prayer. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Holy Creator, surprise and delight us with the beauty of the world you have made. Bless the work of landscapers, architects, and artists whose work invites us into harmonious living with your creation. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Holy Judge, let justice roll down like waters over this world. Reign over the courtrooms of every land, in the hearts of those who guard the law and those who stand accused of crimes. Be present in this time after the election of leaders; and guide them with your Spirit to work together for justice and mercy. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Holy Companion, console those who feel lonely or abandoned. Share the hours of those who live and eat alone. Comfort those who have few friends or who struggle with their identity and place in this world. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Holy Protector, be with all observing Veterans Day. Guard the lives of active duty and retired military personnel. Comfort all who mourn those who have died in the line of duty. Heal the wounds, both physical and mental, experienced by service members. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Holy and Immortal One, we pray in thanksgiving for the lives of all who have died. Remind us of the frailty and shortness of our own lives and inspire us to use them for the building up of your kingdom. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Receive our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior, until that day when you gather all creation around your throne where you will reign forever and ever. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

Closing Hymn ELW # 638

Blessed Assurance

Listen and sing along [here](#).

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Today's reflection was written by Pastor Ray Sipe.