

Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost [Ord 33]
19-11-2023
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Judges 4:1-10 Deborah calls Barak to lead the fight against the Canaanites

Psalm 123 Look to God for Mercy

1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11 You are Children of the Light, not Darkness
Support one another

Matthew 25: 14-30 Jesus tells the parable of the loaned money (Talents)

Introduction

Today we conclude our five week exploration of the first letter of Paul to the Thessalonians. Though we have not looked at every verse, we have covered the main themes from each chapter, and today we will be covering the first eleven verses of the final chapter, chapter five.

Today we will look at how Paul is:-

1. Reminding them that Jesus could come at any time.
2. Telling them that in becoming followers of Jesus they became children of the light and not darkness.
3. Reminding them that their hope is in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and
4. Encouraging them to encourage and build up one another.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

Let's begin with verses 1 to 3:-

¹ Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. ² For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ 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!

These words echo the words of Jesus, that we find in the gospel accounts of Jesus' life. In just two weeks time, on Advent Sunday, we will hear in Marks Gospel:-

³² 'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.

Jesus made it pretty clear in his teachings that he was going to return. He said there would be signs of what would happen before his return, but he also made it clear that his return would be at a time unknown to us.

Jesus was known as an Eschatological Prophet. Where the word “Eschatology” concerns expectations of the end of the present age, human history, or the world itself. Eschatology is present in not only Christianity, but in many religions. This is no surprise, as in the finite nature of our human lives, we are drawn to eternity. In the resurrection of Jesus, eternal life is made clear, and Jesus is the way to get there, but we do not know when he will return.

Paul wants to make this clear. That is why he doesn't just use one image, but three here, including “a thief in the night”, and “sudden destruction after a declaration of peace”, and “labour pains at birth”.

And that is why we are called to be ready, for when Jesus will return.

1 Thessalonians 5:4-8

Let's continue with verses 4 to 8:-

⁴ But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; ⁵ for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. ⁶ So then, let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; ⁷ for those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. ⁸ 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.

Paul is using here the analogy of night and day to describe who the Thessalonians had become, through their Christian Faith. Granted the imagery might not be as vivid for us, now that we have electricity to provide as much light as we want whenever we want, but I think the analogy is still a very good one. I was trying to think of things that have changed the way we see things, so of course I googled it. This is what I found when I looked for what was the first ever movie:-

“The first motion picture film is believed to be Louis Le Prince's Roundhay Garden Scene. This film was recorded in Leeds in England in 1888. It is approximately 2 seconds long and shows some of Louis Le Prince's family members walking around a garden.”

Imagine how strange and different that must have been for the first people who witnessed it. The latest in modern technology, amazing. And yet, think how uneventful it would be for us to see it now, when we can just stick our hands in our pockets, pull out our phones, and watch movies of pretty much anything we like.

I want you to think of an event in your life that changed your life in such a way, so that your life was forever changed. Maybe it was learning something new. Perhaps it was some other experience, like getting married, or having a child. Becoming a Christian should be like that. It should be a life changing experience for us. As Christians we have come to know and experience the love God has for us in Jesus, and if we know this, it should change the way we interact with the world around us.

Paul tells the Thessalonians, as he is also telling us, that we are to be people of light and not people of darkness.

Paul is not just trying to use the universal images of “light for goodness” and “dark for badness”, but rather he is also saying that because we have been made aware of the light, it is natural and expected that we will be drawn to want to stay with the light. Such an experience is not one we will want to turn away from.

If we have really experienced the love of God in Jesus, it will not be something we will want to ever leave. It will be something we crave for and want to be central in our lives.

As Paul tells the Thessalonians, he is also telling us that we need to be ready, and in being ready, we are to be people of Faith, Love and Hope.

1 Thessalonians 5:9-10

Let's continue with verses 9 to 10:-

⁹ For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him.

What lies behind the love we are to have for God and others, is the love that God first had for us. God created us, and God does not want us lost or cut off from the ultimate, in God's love for us. But God does not force us. God sent Jesus for us. And if we accept what Jesus has done for us, we can be assured of, as Paul puts it, “obtaining salvation”. We don't have to be anxious about whether we are good enough, because we never will be. That's why Jesus died on the cross for us, and it is in the death and resurrection of Jesus that we have the assurance that we can never be cut off from God's love. Those who accept Jesus, have the assurance they will live with Jesus forever.

1 Thessalonians 5:11

And now, let's continue with verse 11:-

¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Paul had received word back about how the Church in Thessalonica was going. He knew they had continued to gather to praise and worship God. He knew they were standing firm in the face of persecution. He knew they were sharing the “Good News” of Jesus. He knew how they had encouraged the other Christian communities around them. But he still tells them to “Encourage one another and build up each other”.

Being a follower of Jesus is the most rewarding thing we can do with our lives. In fact, as Christians, we believe it is the primary thing we are designed to do. Christians believe that as human beings we are created by God to live in relationship with God. But like other things that have value in our world, being a Christian can mean hard work for us.

And that is why Paul told the Thessalonians to continue to encourage one another. When things are hard, it is good to get encouragement to help us. Someone said to me recently, thanks for praying for me, and that was, actually a real encouragement to me.

When was the last time you said to another parishioner, "Great to see you at worship today!", or when was the last time you called another parishioner just to say G'day, and pray with them.

The World Cup for Cricket is now on and people from many different countries around the world have been cheering on and encouraging their teams. As Christians, gathered here today, our team is St Cuthbert's. How are we cheering and supporting and encouraging one another?

Conclusion

Over the last five weeks we have been looking at Paul's first Letter to the Thessalonians.

We have looked at how Paul wrote to assure them of their faith, especially in the hope of the resurrection through Jesus. And we have seen how much Paul loved them and wanted to encourage them in the faith.

I pray that we too, have been reminded it is in Jesus we have hope, and have been encouraged to remain firm and hold fast to this hope.

May we go out from worship today as "Children of the Light", sharing God's Faith, Love, and Hope.

Amen.