

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend Anne H.K. Apple
Sunday, November 15, 2020

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 labor 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.

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Memphis shows up.

In the Bible. Not our Memphis, but the ancient city on the Nile River. Memphis, Egypt. The Hebrew prophets had lots to say to Memphis on behalf of God. Jeremiah describes *the Day of the Lord* as that day when the guilty are judged, the faithful delivered.

A day when God's sword would devour and be sated.
A day of punishment for those who sinned.

In Jeremiah 46, Memphis specifically shows up.

Egypt is condemned for their mistreatment of Israel. Jeremiah says, "Pack your bags for exile sheltered daughter Egypt. For Memphis shall become a waste, a ruin without inhabitant. I will hand them over to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon."

In Jeremiah 6, the prophet speaks for God and says, "They have treated the wound of my people carelessly saying, '*Peace. Peace*' when there is no peace."

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The mistreatment of people and the empty proclamation of peace creates a cover of darkness and sin. The prophet continues, encouraging the people of God to “Stand at the crossroads and look, and as for ancient paths, where the good way lies - and walk in it and find rest for your souls.”

“For Memphis shall become a waste, a ruin without inhabitant.” That’s not really what I want for Memphis, our Memphis. And it is a stern warning from the prophet to those who would mistreat and abuse another population and place.

“Peace. Peace! when there is no peace.”

Paul writes to the Thessalonians because they have concerns about the “Day of the Lord.” Paul writes to reassure them about a fear they carry. Like scripture reveals - they can’t know when that day will come. But, they do know that it will - and when it comes there is no escaping God’s righteous judgment for those who say, “There is peace and security ...” - but know that it is a lie.

This language about the *Day of the Lord*, thief in the night, text is somewhat hard for us. Eschatology is the fifty cent word in theology that talks about such endings - the science of last things. The study of the final events of history and humanity, the end of the world as we know it by God’s judgment.

For the community in 1 Thessalonians, they don’t and can’t know what tomorrow will bring. Paul says to the Thessalonians, an encouraging word, “You are doing good work - I really don’t need to write this letter - but I am going to. Keep up the good work!”

You, Thessalonians, live at a crossroads.

That intersection is of Chronos and Kairos. Chronological time, Chronos - day in and day out, and God’s time, Kairos, (seasons) You, Thessalonians, are doing well, a beacon of light at the intersection, so keep up that good work.

Paul reminds the Thessalonians to remember that they are children of light, children of the day. Beacons of light.

Annie Dillard, says, “We are here to witness the creation and to abet it. We are here to notice each thing so each thing gets noticed. Together we notice not only each mountain shadow and each stone on the beach but, especially, we notice the beautiful faces and complex natures of each other. We are here to bring to consciousness the beauty and power that are around us and to praise the people who are here with us. We witness our generation and our times. We watch the weather. Otherwise, creation would be playing to an empty house.”

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To be children of light. “We notice the beautiful faces and complex natures of each other. We are here to bring to consciousness the beauty and power that are around us.” We each live at that intersection of each day and God’s time and notice and bring to consciousness the beauty and God’s power around us. We don’t just notice - but we must choose to move with what we notice.

As the church, as the baptized, we remember who we are as children of light. We are to live in God’s goodness, for evil prowls around every day. We are to seek Christ’s order in worldly chaos. We are to live trusting that joy comes out of sorrowful nights. We are called to remember this hope of salvation we have in Jesus Christ. Today, Peter and Elizabeth will take promises for their sweet little Annie as she comes to the waters of baptism. Julie, Brent, Aiden and Miles make a commitment to be grown together in Christ’s light at baptism buddies. As a church we will make promises for this baptism family today. These are not commitments made or taken lightly.

For light cannot coexist with darkness. Every small bit of light dispels darkness. William Blake said, “we are given a bit of space to bear the beams of love.” To be beacons of light means we bear the beams of love.

As Christ’s people, in Chronos time, day by day, we must move with love toward justice, God’s justice, and Kairos. Moving with love towards justice is hard work and can be difficult. Read about the martyrs. Try risking a conversation, and action, for the sake of how you understand your faith in Christ Jesus. Politicized. Criticized. Moving with love towards justice is hard work.

Jesus said, “Let your light so shine.” “Walk in the light. Believe in the light.” We are to be light in the midst of darkness. We are to show up as light. Not any light but Christ’s light with God’s power. That is moving with love towards justice - as beacons of Christ light, working together for Peace, true Peace - that is our calling as disciples.

When we live in Christ’s light - we live with a wakeful readiness to serve, with sober and dependable discretion. We risk trusting in God’s purpose for our lives that we might be children of light. This life lived out under God’s power isn’t easy but it is the life we commit to when we baptize, and remember whose and who we are as God’s Beloved.

Encourage one another, Paul says, Build each other up. I wonder what that looks like and I hope that together we know.

To God be all glory, now and forever, Amen.