

Last Sunday of the Church Year: November 20, 2022
“Don’t Worry, Everything Is Fine”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text this morning is from our Epistle reading, 1 Thessalonians 5, *“You yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, ‘There is peace and security,’ then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴ But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. ⁵ For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. ⁶ So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.”*¹

From peace and security to sudden destruction, that’s how quick the Lord’s second coming will be. There are signs that the time is near, but the exact time is known only to the Father. To help us understand, a woman in labor is illustrated. Everything seems to be going on just fine, maybe a bit uncomfortable, things are starting to change, and then it happens. There is a sudden seizing of birth pains and all at once there is helplessness. The woman freezes, gritting teeth and attempting to breath; the man watches with the sinking realization that he really can do nothing.

So will be the return of Christ. There will be many who will live and speak as things are just fine. The things of the world will be viewed and touted as the only means by which peace and security are given. As we near the holiday season, Christmas music can already be heard. I would have no problems with music proclaiming Christ Him crucified, the reason for the season, the baby in manger who has come for the salvation of mankind being played; but, instead we hear of peace on earth found in the many gifts we are to buy, the food we are to eat, and the memories we are to share with friends and family. We are told by the world that to have the right tree, the right package, the right people around the table, we can then peacefully say, “I’m fine. Everything is fine.”

¹ 1 Thessalonians 5:2–8

And what of security? This one is easy to diagnose. We talk about financial and food insecurity. We go to great lengths to secure our homes and vehicles. Great amounts of resources are spent to put locks on our doors and windows, and alarms on our cars. Many even have locks on their inside doors to secure their own room from the rest of the house. We talk about securing our borders and securing our ballots. Great care is given to the alarms raised by the insecurity of these things. We have companies that will watch our stuff 24 hours a day and alert us to any potential problem. Then with one simple alert, quick action is taken to avert any possible threat.

How much time is given to secure our faith? Do we take faith security seriously? What lengths are we willing to go to make sure our faith securely rests in peace, the peace of God that passes all understanding? When someone is sent, who raises an alarm to the insecurity of our faith, or dangers to our faith, or threats to our everlasting peace, do we rush into action? Sadly, these alarms are often met with non-action. The alarm of the Law rings loudly to get our attention, and our sinful nature is content in going, "It's not that serious. You don't know what you're talking about, Pastor. I'm fine. Just fine. Everything is fine."

Do you know where this leads? The second illustration in our text today. Concerning the Second Coming of Jesus, we are to be sober instead of drunk. One of the strangest things about being drunk, is the drunk doesn't always know they are drunk. When asked, they say, "I'm fine." When trying to get them to turn in their keys, to do something for their own good, they will respond, "No need for that, I'm fine. You don't know what you're talking about. Everything is fine."

Paul is not speaking on the excesses of drinking here; he does that in other places. In this context, he warns about spiritual drunkenness. It is a great illustration to highlight the lapse of peace and security. What happens when someone is drunk? Memory can diminish, even lapse all together. Speech is slurred. Feet are unsteady, and judgment is bad. When in this state, there can be serious consequences, including, physical injury – both to the self and others, not just to the body, but also relationships, emotions, possessions and reputations.

To be drunk can have some serious ramifications, but to be spiritually drunk is far worse. The same impairments exhibit themselves, but with eternal consequences. Speech is slurred, that is, God's Word is smeared with our own words. Instead of God's Word

being spoken clearly, His Word is mixed with our own until it is nothing but a discombobulated assortment of word vomit. Or worse, His word is misquoted, as we tamper it down in effort to take the edge out of God's Word.

With unsteady words, often comes unsteady feet. As the words swirl and confuse our heads, our feet don't know where to go. We stagger from one place to another, limping between gods, hoping that one will finally give me what I am looking for. Instead of walking the straight path illuminated by the light of God's Word, we stumble in the dark, looking for something on which to lean, or we stumble and fall face-first on the cold, hard, unforgiving ground.

As we slur and stumble, our memory just isn't what it is supposed to be. The security of knowing has gaps that we cannot recall. To what does this lead? No peace. In the heat of the moment, when anger flashes, when sadness slashes, when sickness or trouble cuts deep and fast, how easy is it to forget God, what He has done, what He continues to do, what He promises, and what He says in each and all of those moments.

These all lead to bad judgment. When we make foolish choices, we endanger not just ourselves, but those around us. It is not just us who stumble, but we are in danger of causing others to stumble with us. What then do we do? Sometimes we try to convince ourselves by convincing others, "I'm fine. Everything is just fine." Sometimes we make drunken phone calls, where we say all kinds of things out of emotion or confusion, only to not have any idea what we are saying. In the drunken state, there is no correction that wants to take place; the drunk have a lot to say and not much room for listening. They no longer wish to imbibe on the Word of God, they only seek to expel what is inside. What is inside? Jesus illuminates, "***Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person.***"²

Which one of us can claim perfect, pure soberness at all times and in all places? How often must we confess that we have slurred, stumbled, forgot, and made fool judgments? Where then is our peace? How can we rest secure? We know the Bridegroom is coming. We don't know when, but we do know what. He is coming to Judge the living and dead. He does so today, when a person dies, they are judged. The righteous to eternal life, the unbelievers to eternal death.

² Matthew 15:19–20

When He comes, those with faith, with oil in their lamps, will be in the wedding feast that has no end. The faithless, those without oil, will be left out in the dark where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Those with faith, will be secure inside the everlasting walls enjoying eternal peace.

This is only by the grace of God. Jesus will come again, and judge based on His first coming. His first coming, as a baby in the womb of Mary, born in a stable in Bethlehem, fled to Egypt, lived in Nazareth, baptized by John, preached repentance, rode into Jerusalem, taught in the Temple, then falsely arrested, convicted, and sentenced to death lived a perfect life. He completely fulfilled the Law, kept every commandment, and died your death for sin on the cross. Where mankind is spiritually drunk, Jesus was spiritually sober. The drunk do their thing at night, and Jesus will bring all things to the light—even the night is not dark to Him. He neither slumber nor sleeps, and all things have been placed under His feet.

Brothers and sisters, for your peace, for your eternal security, see what Christ has done. Jesus never slurred His speech. He never misspoke the Word of God. He never shied away from the truth. He never mixed His own feelings with God's Word, or tried to soften God's Law. He spoke clearly, even when threatened. Even when Satan tried to mix it up, making his own twisted temptations to lure Jesus away, Jesus spoke straight on the rocks. Even as shot after shot was poured out at His feet, Jesus only took one drink—the wrath of God against sin. That He drank all the way to the dregs for you.

In His spiritual soberness, He never walked a crooked path. He never stumbled or swayed. Words and walking together are spoken of Him in Isaiah, "***The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting. But the Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.***"³

His memory never failed, and with His perfect memory, He is the only one who can truly and rightly, judge justly. From the beginning of time, He knows all that has ever been

³ Isaiah 50:4–7

done, and will be done. He knows every sin you will commit. He knows what lies deep in your heart and mind. He knows all the hurtful hate-filled words you spew and all the licentious, wicked words and pictures you ingest. He knows with perfect clarity every failure and cover-up you attempt, and He died for them all. He gave His life, shed His own blood, so that He can say to all the faithful, ***“I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.”***⁴

You, brothers and sisters in Christ, He is speaking to you. Your transgressions are blotted out. He does not remember your sins. With eternal peace, you are secure in everlasting salvation, and this you know because you are baptized. As you are in Christ, how wonderfully your speech is clear and feet are strengthened to confess with the psalmist, ***“He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children’s children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.”***⁵

This is what it means to be in Christ. You don’t live by your works; you live by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. You don’t make yourself a child of the light, it was given to you, suddenly, and fully in the waters of baptism. Instead of drunken, staggering, stinky rags, He has dressed you in the armor of light; He has clothed you in Himself. He gives you the breastplate of faith and love, and the helmet of hope and salvation. These things are not what you do, but what Christ has done for you, and what He gives to you.

Whether Christ returns today or tomorrow, you are ready. If He comes before you die, or whether your body must first rest in the grave, He has made you ready. Instead of being spiritually drunk, He invites you, the spiritually sober to drink His blood for the forgiveness of your sins.

⁴ Isaiah 43:25

⁵ Psalm 103:10–18

Here you proclaim His death, which paid for your sins, and gives you eternal life. Nothing in all creation can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus, your Lord. The darkness of death could not silence Jesus and the cross could not drive Him off of the path of life for you. Here you feast on His death, receiving His life, and this you do until He comes again in all His glory, boldly proclaiming in Christ, "I'm fine. Everything is fine."

As beloved children of the light, may we sing,

"Zion hears the watchmen singing,
And all her heart with joy is springing;
 She wakes, she rises from her gloom.
For her Lord comes down all-glorious,
The strong in grace, in truth victorious;
 Her star is ris'n, her light is come.
Now come, Thou Blessèd One,
Lord Jesus, God's own Son,
 Hail! Hosanna!
We enter all
The wedding hall
To eat the Supper at Thy call."⁶ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

⁶ Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying LSB 516:2

Prayer of the Church
Last Sunday of the Church Year
20 November 2022

Heavenly Father, Your Church eagerly awaits the return of her Bridegroom. Grant that we would not grow weary. Strengthen us through Your Word and Sacraments, that we would ever hold fast to Your promise of salvation won for us by Christ, our Savior. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We give You thanks, O God, for our Lord Jesus Christ and the reconciliation He brought. Make us a kingdom of priests who proclaim the riches of Your name for the benefit of all people. Bless Your Holy Church throughout the world, that Your Word may be freely preached to the joy and edification of every land and nation. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious Lord, bless all farmers, ranchers and everyone who works to deliver the bounty of Your goodness. Grant seasonable weather and plentiful harvests, keeping us ever mindful that the fruits of our labor are all a gift from Your hand. Make us faithful stewards over all You have entrusted to our care. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

King of the nations, grant wisdom, humility and integrity to those who govern us, especially to Joseph, our president; Kim, our governor; and all who make, administer and judge our laws, that the work of their hands would be of benefit to all whom they serve and in accordance with Your will. Bring peace to our troubled world, that all would hear the message of the Gospel and rejoice in Your salvation. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *Emily and Pastor Koepp* grant that by Your Word and Spirit they may faithfully keep the covenant into which they have been called, boldly confess their Savior, and finally share with all Your saints the joys of eternal life; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Chezlie and Tyler* celebrate their birthdays. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Creator of all, many in our midst have been afflicted with pain, sickness, trials and difficulties. Be merciful to those who are close to us, *especially Marvin, Ruth, Zoey, Laurel, Wanda, Duane, Greg, Pastor Small (St. Silas, North Liberty) and those we name in our hearts* that they may be granted health or strength to endure their afflictions. Help us all to see that when Christ returns in glory, our bodies will be incorruptible and immortal when He makes all things new. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Giver of the feast, You provide a foretaste of the divine wedding banquet at Your Son's table. Grant repentance and faith to all who commune this day, that they may receive His body and blood in a worthy manner and show forth His praise in their lives. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, heavenly Father, we gratefully remember the sufferings and death of Your dear Son, Jesus Christ, for our salvation. Rejoicing in His victorious resurrection from the dead, we draw strength from His ascension before You, where He ever stands for us as our own High Priest. Gather us together from the ends of the earth to celebrate with all the faithful the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, which has no end. Graciously receive our prayers, deliver and preserve us, for to You alone we give all glory, honor and worship, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**