

Last Sunday of the Church Year: November 22, 2020
“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, securing our ballots, and securing our facemasks. 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

² Matthew 15:19-20

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. 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 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 breastplate of faith and

³ Isaiah 50:4–7

⁴ Isaiah 43:25

⁵ Psalm 103:10–18

love, and the helmet of the hope of 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. 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, we soberly, securely pray in peace,

“To the rest Thou didst prepare me
On Thy cross; O Christ, upbear me!
Spare, O God, in mercy spare me!”⁶ Amen.

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

⁶ Day of Wrath, O Day of Mourning TLH 607:19

Prayer of the Church
Last Sunday of the Church Year
22 November 2020

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Almighty and eternal God, worthy to be held in reverence by all people everywhere, we give You humble and sincere thanks for the innumerable blessings that You have bestowed on us without any merit or worthiness on our part. We praise You especially for preserving for us Your saving Word and Holy Sacraments. Grant and preserve to Your Holy Church throughout the world purity of doctrine, and provide faithful pastors to preach Your Word with power. Help all who hear the Word rightly to understand and truly to believe it. Send laborers into Your harvest, and open the door of faith to those who do not know You. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, in mercy bring to repentance the enemies of Your Church, and grant them amendment of life. Protect and defend Your Church in all tribulation and danger, and sustain with Your Spirit our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who experience persecution. Strengthen us and all fellow Christians to set our hope fully on the grace revealed in Christ, and help us to fight the good fight of faith, that in the end we may receive the salvation of our souls. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving God, bestow Your grace on all nations of the earth. Bless especially our country, its inhabitants and all who are in authority. Let Your glory dwell in our land, that mercy and truth, righteousness and peace may abound in all places. Bless also all who serve in our armed forces, that they may serve with integrity and honor. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Compassionate Lord, graciously defend us from all calamity by fire and water, from war and pestilence, from scarcity and famine, from the pandemic, and from every other evil. Protect and prosper all who labor in their rightful callings, and let all useful arts flourish among us. Be the God and Father of the lonely and the forsaken, the helper of the sick and needy, the comforter of the distressed and those who sorrow. Look with mercy upon the shut-ins, the sick, the recovering, and all who have requested our prayers, *[including Carmen, Susan, Pastor Brian Saunders, Linda Freese, Bob Boyle, Esther, Zoey, Jen Zebuhr, Gordon Robbins, Marvin Karstens, Keith Teggatz, Mary Ann Teggatz and those we name in our hearts,]* that they may ever cling to Jesus as their sure and certain hope. 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* celebrate her birthday. Grant that she 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 her life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Grant Your Holy Spirit to those who come to the Lord's table this day, that they may receive the very body and blood of Jesus Christ in sincere repentance and firm faith, and to their abundant blessing. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Father, as we are strangers and pilgrims on earth, help us by true faith and a godly life to prepare for the world to come, doing the work You have given us to do while it is day, before the night comes when no one can work. And when our last hour comes, support us by Your power and receive us into Your heavenly Kingdom; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**