

Our second scripture reading for today once again concerns the day of the Lord, that Amos referenced; and we are once again as the church season of ordinary time is coming closer to an end, and we will soon start the new liturgical year when advent begins, if you want to learn more about the liturgical calendar please come, or watch on Youtube our service next week on Christ the King Sunday,

If you couldn't tell, my church geek, and liturgical nerd heart is really looking forward to the service, so if you hate it feel free to blame me, if you end up loving next week feel free to tell JoAnn, Bill and Janet and everyone who is helping to read that Sunday how wonderful it is.

Christ the King Sunday which in many ways is the New Years eve of the church calendar, affirms Jesus as Lord of creation, ruler of the cosmos, and places faith in the sovereignty of God over the life of the world.

In many ways it affirms what is announced to a young girl named Mary, who bears, births, nurses, and raises a young boy who will grow up to be the promised salvation that the Apostle Pauls writes about in his letters, that we still sing about, and preach about, and trust in around 2000 years later.

So as we approach the end of the liturgical year, and the profession that Christ is Cosmic and intimate, King and ruler, friend and sibling

The lectionary provides and assigns passages that concern that Day of the Lord, that kingdom of Heaven, that parousia, or second coming as some call it,

It seems to speak to anxiety and a reality that we need only turn on the news, open social media, or pick up a newspaper (if you can find one) to see that people are dealing with real concerns here and now...

From racism, to homophobia, sexism, poverty, inflation, politics, natural disasters, domestic violence, random violence, Natural disasters...

How do we make sense of a God we name as good, and a world where bad things happen;

I am not going to untangle, or solve that theological debate today, or probably in my lifetime, but we hold it in tension, and I mention it, because this problem, sometimes known as theodicy is not unique to us today,

But is a part of what Jesus was addressing when he warned to keep awake and to look for the coming reign of heaven.

It is a reality that Paul had when he wrote his letters, and he sought to address the real concerns in people's lives.

Which does bring us to Paul's first letter to the church in Thessalonica, of First Thessalonians as it also referred to. A city in Greece in the northern part of the Aegean sea;

This actually happens to be the oldest letter in the new testament. Dated around year 45 or more likely 50 it is at least the earliest writing included in the new testament, even earlier than the writing of the four gospels,

And it is primarily Paul addressing the concerns of this early church as the day of the Lord, the end, the second coming (whatever you call it) has not occurred, or at least not how they thought it would; at least not as soon as they thought and baptized members of the church have died before that day,

A concern that seems foreign to us thousands of years later where life cycles and services that witness to the resurrection and all the rituals are well formed and comforting;

But a Christian funeral in year 50, in Thessalonica, could not pull out, adapt, and personalize the bulletin from another recent service, because this was a new reality that the church was learning to deal with.

The thessalonians are also dealing with their new identity in opposition to the Roman Empire and cultic worship, and as they seek to form and create a community called church

How do we today build a community that is becoming more secular and more religiously pluralistic

And out of all this, and much more they are trying to figure out what to do, how do the thessalonians live as a church, how do we live as a church... with a real sense that the 'end' was near, and in many ways it is, life is short, and yet in other ways the world keeps turning

Monya A. Stubbs notes that through this letter, paul "Recognizes the pain of those who eagerly await the Lord's return and simultaneously promises them hope and new life"

And so here comes Paul's letter, the church planter, and apostle who is now trying to help the church make sense out of this reality, of a new and different world that holds in tension the shortness, the waiting, the precarious position that the early church found itself, and

So Paul writes:

In 1st Thessalonians chapter 5

5:1 Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you.

5:2 For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

5:3 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!

5:4 But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief;

5:5 for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness.

5:6 So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober;

5:7 for those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night.

5:8 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.

5:9 For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

5:10 who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him.

Don't Read [5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.]

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God

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Let us pray... may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, oh God our Rock and Redeemer... Amen.

As we think about what we do; what now do we do as we wait for the day of the lord...

As we eagerly await the Lord's return and simultaneously trust in God's promise of hope and new life; and as we live in the new now, and the ever changing reality that seems so face-paced in our digital age...

What do we do in the face of an uncertain future?

Well I think we do so by trusting in that promise that Paul first wrote to the thessalonians, and that should still ring true to us today:

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.

It is a great promise, a promise of love, a promise that Paul will build on, and refine his language as he ends up writing more letters, to more churches, addressing more real life concerns about how do we not just wait for the day of the lord, or to see the king (as our closing hymn proclaims)

And trusting in that promise, even with uncertainty and even with so many unknowns, and worries, about average worship attendance, pledge numbers,

a changing demographic of those in and around our building and those living in the neighborhood and city around us,

real world concerns about the relevancy of the church in the 21st century and so much more

How do we live as a community, as a thing known as ekklesia, or church:

If you followed along in your pew bible, or just happen to know this passage very well, I left out the final verse, verse 11 where paul gives his practical advice to the church.

5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Paul use a present tense here, as you are doing

Encourage one another, build each other up, as indeed you are doing.

Keep it up.

Great things are happening in this congregation,

You are doing it. Keep it up.

God is working through you, as you care for one another, as you feed your neighbors, and cook green chili soup and bid on items that will end up supporting our partners in ministry, you are living into both the joy of your calling and the love that God promises each and every one of us.

As we build up the church and encourage one another there are so many ways that we can do that.

To show our love, love of God, love of neighbor, and to form a community a church.

We can encourage, and build up, by loving boldly

Daniel Tiger has become a most requested television show in our household, and as a presbyterian clergy couple Essie and I are thrilled that Lucy enjoys the wholesome and educational spin-off of Mister Rogers Neighborhood,

One of the pedagogical tools it uses are catchy tunes and phrases, earworms that parents can later sing to remind a child, or perhaps themselves, of the episode and its lessons

Like, When you feel so mad that you want to Roar, just take a deep breath, and count to four...

One of the episodes, that Lucy and I watched this week, taught us to

“Find your own way to say I love you”

In the episode Daniel Tiger learns that you could send cards, surprise someone with their favorite banana bread, sing songs, teach or spend time as ways to say I love you...

And so you too, perhaps you can find your own way to build up the person sitting next to you, to encourage our congregation and our neighbors and neighborhood and world.

Find your own way to love Boldly

Gary Chapman published The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate in 1992 that laid out five love languages...different ways that people express, and best understand romantic love:

the five love languages are Words of affirmation, Acts of Service, Receiving gifts, Quality time, and physical touch

While the book was based on how couples express love between each other, I think it can serve as a reminder of what Daniel Tiger sang and learned, of what Paul exhorts and commends to Thessalonica,

One of the best explanations of the five love languages that I have come across is to take each love language and imagine how they relate to tacos...

Words of Affirmation:

"Your tacos are delicious."

Acts of Service:

"I made you tacos."

Receiving Gifts:

"Here's a taco."

Quality Time:

"Let's go out for tacos together."

Physical Touch:

"Let me hold you like a taco."

That may feel silly, but it is a reminder that there are many ways to love, to encourage, to build up.

Perhaps it is to sing in the choir, cook, visit, call, build with Habitat, help plan worship, or volunteer with building, teach adult education, to pledge and generously give financially, to drive someone to worship, to hold a hand at a bedside or give a large hug during the passing of the peace, or to offer kind words of welcome, or just a smile and nod...

So take a moment, and think about how God is calling you, through all the uncertainty of life, to build up this community of faith; what is the way you can say I love you to one another, to love the world, what love language is your best way to care for our world?

Whatever your love language for being an active member of this community of faith, to build up God's family and to unleash God's saving love into the World.

Amen!