

**IN NOMINE JESU**  
**DIVINE ENCOURAGEMENT**

Our theme verse for this twenty-fifth Sunday after the feast of the Holy Trinity is from St. Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, and reads:

*Even so, encourage one another by these words.<sup>1</sup>*

**Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

Have you been able to tell, by the readings that are coming now each Sunday that the end is drawing near? What end?

The end of the Church Year is certainly here with the readings about the Last Day increasing in intensity. The end of Christians' struggles with sin and death is also proclaimed. The end of the old fallen creation is prophesied. These readings will fill our ears for the next weeks.

This is done for the purpose of reinforcing that the life of Christ reflected in our Sundays of Trinity, is not a life of just miracles, signs and wonders for long ago and far away. That life did not end with Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension. He is not merely biding His time, unconcerned and unaware of the lives of those who hear His Word and strive against our flesh to follow Him.

*Even so, encourage one another by these words.<sup>2</sup>*

That we Christians may have consolation in our lives as we await our final deliverance, Jesus has given us His proclaimed Word. In the letters of the Apostles,

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<sup>1</sup> I Thessalonians 4:18.

<sup>2</sup> I Thessalonians 4:18.

grounded in Jesus' teaching about the death of the faithful and inspired by the Holy Spirit, words convey deep mysteries (and secret code books are not needed to unveil them). A clear example of that is given today, as St. Paul declares:

*For I am unwilling for you to be ignorant, O brothers, concerning the sleeping ones, in order that you may not be sorrowful as also the others, the ones not having hope.<sup>3</sup>*

The Christian faith and its teachings are given by God through His messengers not to keep people in a state of ignorance. They are given that we might have knowledge of God's mysteries, so that we are empowered to live full lives in this sin-filled world. Some political theories that maintain the Christianity is a tool to keep the masses in line. But those suppositions are disproved by the very Word of God such as we have before us today. They are given that we might encourage one another. Paul plainly states to believing Christians that we are not to be ignorant of the Truth as he goes on to re-define death for those who are in Christ.

God, in His wisdom, in Christ, has given you Christians hope – in forgiveness, in life after death, in heaven, in the resurrection. To reinforce that hope in you, He has given you powerful words to describe the putting away of your struggle with the Old Nature, the World and the Devil.

Death for the Christian is called "sleep" in this passage. The word we translate "sleep" is also used to describe the deaths of the faithful elsewhere in Scripture. It even is used to describe the end of life for those, like Stephen, who suffered an horrible death by stoning. Even to non-Christian minds, the word "sleep" indicates that the person is

resting, and will eventually rise to begin a new day. The image of sleep over/against death is a powerful one, and it encourages hope in the believer. St. Paul continues:

*For if we continue to believe that Jesus died and rose, even so God will lead together with Him the ones who through Jesus have fallen asleep.*<sup>4</sup>

Those are not controlling words, but words of fact and encouragement. That is, the divine reality that you believe Jesus died for your sins and rose to be the first-fruits of the resurrection means that you will participate completely in His work. In fact, in the Water and Word of Holy Baptism you already have! As other texts remind you, the faithful, you have already died with Christ and risen to new life in Him. That participation in Baptism, for those like you who cling to its treasures each day, means that you will participate one day, on the Last Day, in the resurrection of the blessed dead who have – to use divine language - fallen asleep in Christ.

(Does it seem like this is a funeral sermon. Perhaps it is. In a way, you have attended your own funeral – the death of the Old Adam – when you attended your own Baptism. So, what then should you expect to hear at your funeral service – that your good works and merit earned heaven for you? If that were so, either you, or the preacher, or both would not be true Christians! So, we'll continue with this funeral sermon, and declare again that Christ has done everything necessary for your entrance into heaven, your sleep to the Last Day, and your resurrection to blessed eternal life)!

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<sup>3</sup> I Thessalonians 4:13

<sup>4</sup> I Thessalonians 4:14.

Jesus has already gone where you must go. He has entered into death – a more horrible suffering and execution than you or I will likely experience. His lifeless body was laid in the dust of the earth. He descended into Hell itself – and declared there His victory – that you never have to enter that place of eternal blasphemy and fire. He rose from the dead, that He might lead you someday from death’s sleep into life with Him. Jesus ascended into the heavens to place our flesh in its God-ordained place, the pinnacle of creation. He comes again to take you, and all believers, to rule with Him forever. (Those teachings are contained in the Three Ecumenical Creeds. Can you discern how important the summaries of the Creeds are to encourage and comfort believers? They keep the realities of Christ’s work for and in us before us, and our children, and grandchildren, and great-grandchildren throughout the generations). Jesus leads those who cling to Him to the places where He has already gone. The path is clear, the way is straight, and rest is there! Our last day encouragement continues:

*For this we are saying to all of you by (the) word of (the) Lord, that we, the living ones continually being left behind until the coming of the Lord have definitely not preceded the sleeping ones;*<sup>5</sup>

Paul’s appeal to the truth is that he speaks God’s word. This is not a fairy-tale to make death more palatable. It is a declaration of reality, God’s revealed truth, that the Christian, you, may cling to no matter how death may come to you. That is, should you be alive on the Day that Jesus returns, you will join Him and the others. In terms of time,

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<sup>5</sup> I Thessalonians 4:15.

which will cease as we know it, you will witness the sleepers awake first. How this will be, Paul describes,

*because, He, the Lord, by (a) command, by(a) voice of archangel, and by (a) trumpet of God, He will descend from heaven and the dead ones in Christ meet Him first,*<sup>6</sup>

Everyone on earth will witness this wonder. Jesus' return will be no secret. His gathering of the elect will be visible to all. It will be heard. There will be a command, as a military leader barks out his direction. The Voice of the Ruler of the Angels will ring out. The Lord's own trumpet, reflected dimly in the Old Testament calls to worship – lost to our minds – will sound. Everyone will hear.

And everyone will see Jesus returning on the clouds, as He once ascended. But now, he will come as the lightning strikes, in speed and glory, and the graves will open and the sleepers awake! What majesty is proclaimed in these words of comfort! What hope!

Our hymn will resound soon with words formed from that comfort and hope. Draw your voices, ears, hearts, and minds to these words you will sing:

*Mighty Victim from the sky,  
Hell's fierce pow'rs beneath You lie;  
You have conquered in the fight,  
You have brought us life and light.*<sup>7</sup>

The power, majesty, glory and honor that belongs to Jesus will be revealed, and you, dear Christians, know them, sing of them, participate in them, and will receive them fully on the Last Day. Does this mean that you will never doubt those realities?

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<sup>6</sup> I Thessalonians 4:16.

<sup>7</sup> "At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing," *Lutheran Service Book* # 633.

Of course not. That is why the Church places such texts before us. They call us back from our sins of losing hope in God's fulfilling His promises. They, the Word, offer us forgiveness and point us to that which is already ours, even now, as St. Paul continues,

*then we, the living ones remaining, together with them will be seized in (the) clouds to meet the Lord in (the) air; and thus always we will be together with (the) Lord.*<sup>8</sup>

There, in a plain and clear declaration, is what will happen when the Lord returns.

The sleepers in Christ, having been brought forth from the dust of the earth by the Creator's Word, will be joined by those still living by grace through faith in this world.

The word that describes this meeting is used mainly to describe the greetings people give to dignitaries. It is formal, not a free-for-all, a divinely choreographed meeting in the air.

Hear the whole sentence as it was likely meant to be read:

*For this we are saying to all of you by (the) word of (the) Lord, that we, the living ones continually being left behind until the coming of the Lord have definitely not preceded the sleeping ones; because, He, the Lord, by (a) command, by(a) voice of archangel, and by (a) trumpet of God, He will descend from heaven and the dead ones in Christ meet Him first, then we, the living ones remaining, together with them will be seized in (the) clouds to meet the Lord in (the) air; and thus always we will be together with (the) Lord.*<sup>9</sup>

This text, and our Gospel for today, is given to keep we who would be faithful in the sure and certain hope of the return of Jesus. These words, understood from their contexts, keep us from following false prophets. Those are among us in plenty. Their books become bestsellers, series, and movies. Flee from them, and remember the doctrine you have, or are now, learning,

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<sup>8</sup> I Thessalonians 4:17.

<sup>9</sup> I Thessalonians 4:15-17.

*whoever teaches and lives otherwise than as the Word of God teaches, profanes the name of God among us. From this preserve us, heavenly Father!*<sup>10</sup>

We return to our text:

*then we, the living ones remaining, together with them will be seized in (the) clouds to meet the Lord in (the) air; and thus always we will be together with (the) Lord.*<sup>11</sup>

In the meeting the scripture describes, the faithful, those who have slept in death once and those who never died, will be with Christ Jesus forever. There is no perceptible time lapse from the appearance of Jesus on the clouds to the resurrection of the blessed dead to the catching up of those who in the faith are still alive. There is one joyous event, one Day, and all that has brought trial, pressure and trouble will be removed from the faithful forever.

*Even so, encourage one another by these words.*<sup>12</sup>

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

Trinity XXV (LSB One-year series)

Psalm 14; Job 14:1-6; I Thessalonians 4:13-19; Matthew 24:15-28

November 9, 2008

*Pastor Michael A. Morehouse*

**SOLI DEO GLORIA**

Translation, second draft:

*For I am unwilling for you to be ignorant, O brothers, concerning the ones sleeping, in order that all of you may not be sorrowful just as also the remaining ones, the ones not having hope.*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

<sup>11</sup> I Thessalonians 4:17.

<sup>12</sup> I Thessalonians 4:18.

<sup>13</sup> I Thessalonians 4:13

*For if we are believing that Jesus died and rose, thus also God the ones having fallen asleep, through Jesus will lead them together with Him.<sup>14</sup>*

*For this to all of you we are saying by word of Lord, that we, the living ones continually being left behind into the coming of the Lord definitely not may have preceded the sleeping ones;<sup>15</sup>*

*because, He, the Lord, by command, by voice of archangel, and by trumpet of God, He will descend from heaven and the dead ones in Christ they meet Him first,<sup>16</sup>*

*then we, the living ones, remaining, together with them will be seized in clouds to meet the Lord in (the) air; and thus always together with Lord we will be.<sup>17</sup>*

*Even so, encourage one another by these words.<sup>18</sup>*

Οὐ θέλομεν δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, περὶ τῶν κοιμωμένων, ἵνα μὴ λυπησθε καθὼς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες ἐλπίδα. **14** εἰ γὰρ πιστεύομεν ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἀπέθανεν καὶ ἀνέστη, οὕτως καὶ ὁ θεὸς τοὺς κοιμηθέντας διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἄξει σὺν αὐτῷ.

**15** Τοῦτο γὰρ ὑμῖν λέγομεν ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου, ὅτι ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι εἰς τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ κυρίου οὐ μὴ φθάσωμεν τοὺς κοιμηθέντας· **16** ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ κύριος ἐν κελεύσματι, ἐν φωνῇ ἀρχαγγέλου καὶ ἐν σάλπιγγι θεοῦ, καταβήσεται ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστήσονται πρῶτον, **17** ἔπειτα ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι ἅμα σὺν αὐτοῖς ἄρπαγησόμεθα ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ κυρίου εἰς ἀέρα· καὶ οὕτως πάντοτε σὺν κυρίῳ ἐσόμεθα. **18** Ὡστε παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους ἐν τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Dr. Luther's Small Catechism lesson for the week:***

#### THE FIRST PETITION

*“Hallowed be thy name.”*

What does this mean?

Answer: To be sure, God's name is holy in itself, but we pray in this petition that it may also be holy for us.

<sup>14</sup> I Thessalonians 4:14.

<sup>15</sup> I Thessalonians 4:15.

<sup>16</sup> I Thessalonians 4:16.

<sup>17</sup> I Thessalonians 4:17.

<sup>18</sup> I Thessalonians 4:18.

<sup>19</sup> Aland, B., Aland, K., Black, M., Martini, C. M., Metzger, B. M., & Wikgren, A. 1993, c1979. *The Greek New Testament* (4th ed.). United Bible Societies: Federal Republic of Germany

How is this done?

Answer: When the Word of God is taught clearly and purely and we, as children of God, lead holy lives in accordance with it. Help us to do this, dear Father in heaven! But whoever teaches and lives otherwise than as the Word of God teaches, profanes the name of God among us. From this preserve us, heavenly Father!<sup>20</sup>

Book of Concord

[THE MARKS OF THE ANTICHRIST]

<sup>39</sup> But it is manifest that the Roman pontiffs and their adherents defend godless doctrines and godless forms of worship, and it is plain that the marks of the Antichrist coincide with those of the pope's kingdom and his followers. For in describing the Antichrist in his letter to the Thessalonians Paul calls him "an adversary of Christ who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thess. 2:3, 4). He speaks therefore of one who rules in the church and not of the kings of nations, and he calls that man "an adversary of Christ" because he will devise doctrines which conflict with the Gospel and will arrogate to himself divine authority.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

<sup>21</sup>Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia