

Light and Stability in Uncertain Times

Sermon for the 3rd to Last Sunday in the Church Year

Sermon Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11



Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. ² For 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. ⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ Who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with Him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

People like to know what will happen in the future. That's why movies about the future have been made and there have also always been prophets who liked to make their predictions about the future. You don't need to be a prophet today to know that the world has an end.

Scientific predictions on climate change and other catastrophes warn us that the world will eventually be at its limit. And everything will come to an end. In the Bible, the last day has less to do with any catastrophe and more to do with our Lord Jesus coming again. Just as we confess in the Creed every Sunday: "From thence He will come again to judge the living and the dead." The question, what is coming at us, is not in the Bible. Rather, the question that is asked is: Who is coming to us?

The date when our Lord Jesus returns, remains strictly hidden from us humans. We only know one thing: The last day will come when no one expects it. Suddenly it's there, like a thief in the night.

The danger is that we Christians will also stop waiting for Jesus. The parable of the 10 virgins explains that 5 women stopped waiting for the bridegroom. That's why they didn't have any more oil in their lamps and were not ready when Jesus came.

There are many people today who have given up hope of Jesus' return just like these women. Instead, they desperately search for a future here on this earth. When will scientists finally find a vaccine against the Corona virus? When can we finally return to living normally again? How will we come to terms with all the other dire challenges of our world? While I write these lines, many are thinking with great concern about the outcome of the election in the United States. What if...? What if the outcome of the election is disputed or not immediately clear? Could it drag the United States, and with it the whole world, into a new catastrophe? I don't mean that we Christians can or should isolate ourselves from the many questions of this world. It is also part of our Christian responsibility that we care for the environment responsibly. And it is important to look out for our city's best interests, also politically. And yet we have an entirely different view than others when it comes to the future.

In the letter to the Thessalonians, Paul shows us this view. The many things that happen in this world have a boundary and a time limit. That's why these things can't alarm us. They can't worry us because we see the future in God. In a few days, we will again celebrate the fall of the Berlin wall. And because we live here in Leipzig, I have met many people over the years who have vividly described what happened to them when the Wall came down. I found one account of a pastor and his wife especially heart-warming. The pastor lived with his wife in a small village not far from the West-German border. When word came that the borders were open, the entire village walked or drove over the border. They all wanted to do what had been strictly forbidden for decades: go into the West! The pastor said that the entire village was empty. Not a soul was to be seen. The pastor himself did not cross over the border, at least not right away. Instead, he and his wife went into the church. For the first time they did what was not possible before. They threw the church doors wide open and loudly sang and played the organ: "Now thank we all our God" so that the sounds of praise rang out over the entire village. The peace with which they did this is an example of how we Christians can deal with the events of this world. The border was opened on November 9, 1989. Many were euphoric about this, even the pastor I told you about. But the knowledge of an open heaven and of the border that

was torn open long ago between God and man, gave the pastor a sense of tranquility—in East German times, as well as when the border was open. We Christians do not remain untouched by the events in our world. And yet we remain sober and calm where others get upset. Christians see the events in our world as a great theater production. The lighting technicians in such a theater can do a lot with the lighting. When one of the actors speaks, he or she is suddenly lit up with bright light while the others remain in darkness. Sometimes lighting technicians will illuminate the actors with dark or bright colors. This creates a positive or negative mood. But this lighting is just playing with reality. When the power goes out, everyone has the same lighting. Paul says to us today that the many things that happen to us in this world are similar to such stage lighting. They are not reality. They are just an illusion. And after a short time, what worries us today has already passed.

It is quite different with the light of our God. God's light is what makes it light around us. God is filled with love, light, and warmth. And God's light is no stage light but with Him, everything is always true. And this God illuminates us with His light and tells us unequivocally who we are: We are God's children! And because we are God's children, we let God's light guide us and no other light. We can bask in God's light because we know that we really have a future in Him. Because God has long since determined the future:

⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ Who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with Him.

Yes, in God we all have a future: the sick, the sad, as well as the poor, the weak, and the old; the people who are worried about the Corona pandemic, and also the people who are in the middle of a terrible crisis. All have a future because they are in the light of God, through Jesus. The salvation we receive through Jesus gives us a sure footing. Through Jesus we are as solid as a rock. We are hit by terribly large and dangerous waves. That's true. And yet we remain standing. Why? Because our fate is not built on ourselves and on our future here on earth, but rather on God! We look rationally at the things that happen in our world. But we know just as rationally about the salvation that was secured for us through Jesus. Our salvation is sealed and secured there. And God doesn't first give us this future in heaven, but already now. Even now He gives us everything we need for the journey. Especially when we don't know what to do next. God gives us armor to strengthen us against the attacks of the world. A shield of faith and love protects our body so that the arrows of the many negative things of this world cannot pierce us. We don't allow the hate of this world to weigh down on us and make us bitter. And as a helmet, we wear the hope of the salvation that awaits us.

That's why—already in this life—we can already eagerly await the steps God has planned for us today and tomorrow. That's why we celebrate worship services. The future that we have from and in God is not far away. It's already started. Because Jesus isn't only with us tomorrow and on the last day. He is already here! Amen.