

*Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost*  
*November 8, 2020*

(If you are home read the prayers and scripture readings and recite the Creed aloud, even if you are by yourself, in order to hear with the ears each one. Sing or read the final hymn aloud. If you are worshipping in person, please follow along silently.)

**Prepare for worship:** Sit in silence or with soft music for a few moments

**Call to Worship:**

*Soon and Very Soon (v.1)*

Soon and very soon, we are going to see the King;  
soon and very soon, we are going to see the King;  
soon and very soon, we are going to see the King.  
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! We're going to see the King.

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**Centering Words:**

We live in the mystery of our faith; that Christ has died, Christ is risen and Christ will come again. Christ is in our past. Christ is in our present. Christ will be our future. This is the hope for which we await.

**Prayer of the Day:**

Lord of hope, as we live in the time between your incarnation and your coming again, may we be like the wise bridesmaids. May we always keep our lamps lit by living our lives according to your will each and every day. May we constantly seek your presence wherever we may be. Strengthen our faith so we will be ready for the day of your coming. We pray in the name of the one who is coming again,

**The Lord's Prayer:**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

**Affirmation of Faith:** Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

**Prayer of Illumination:**

Open our ears that we may hear and our hearts and minds that we may receive your word O Lord our rock and redeemer.

(After each reading take two to three minutes to reflect upon the meaning of the passage to you today.)

Old Testament Reading: Joshua 24: 1-3a, 14-25

Psalms 78: 1-7

Gospel Reading: Matthew 25: 1-13

Special Music

Epistle Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18

Sermon: *Living in the In-Between Time*

**Hymn:**

*Blessed Assurance*

1. Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!  
O what a foretaste of glory divine!  
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,  
born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.

Refrain:

This is my story, this is my song,  
praising my Savior all the day long;  
this is my story, this is my song,  
praising my Savior all the day long.

2. Perfect submission, perfect delight,  
visions of rapture now burst on my sight;  
angels descending bring from above  
echoes of mercy, whispers of love.  
(Refrain)
3. Perfect submission, all is at rest;  
I in my Savior am happy and blest,  
watching and waiting, looking above,  
filled with his goodness, lost in his love.  
(Refrain)

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**Benediction:**

May the love of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit strengthen, encourage and empower us to live with hope in this time in between. Amen.

**Response:**

*God Be with You till We Meet Again*

God be with you till we meet again;  
by his counsels guide, uphold you,  
with his sheep securely fold you;  
God be with you till we meet again.

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1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Beginning in February and March of this year our lives changed. This new virus found its way across the world and across our country. In a matter of weeks, life as we knew it changed. Many activities that we did without thinking we suddenly began to think, is it safe? Is it safe to go out to eat? Is it safe to travel? Is it safe to go to the movies or a concert? Is it safe to go shopping? Is it safe to have friends over for a party? Is it safe even to go to church? The predominate theme in our lives today seems to be, is it safe?

How we do things is different. We meet on our computers via zoom instead of getting together in a conference room. We even have church online. We “see” our friends on zoom or facetime.

Before we go into a store or anywhere, we make sure we have our masks. Face masks have gotten to be the latest fashion statement. We live our lives so differently than the way we did last year at this time.

We wonder when and if we will ever be able to return to normal. What will that post pandemic life look like? What changes will we need to make even when a safe vaccine is developed and able to be widely distributed? We do not know what the post COVID-19 life will look like. We are in an in-between time.

This in-between time is a time of stress and anxiety. But we have all experienced in-between times in our lives. There was the time in-between the time we finished school and started our first job. There was the time in-between the time of “I will” to the time of “I do” and we became husband and wife. There may have been that in-between time that pregnancy was discovered and the baby born. There may have been an in-between time of changing jobs or careers. We all have experienced some in-between times in our lives.

These little in-between times and even this great in-between time we are in right now is not the only in-between time we live. We live in another greater in-between time. It is this in-between time that Paul is addressing to the church in Thessalonica in the passage we read today.

Paul was prompted to write this letter to the church in Thessalonica due to a theological crisis within the church. Many early Christians, Paul included, believed that Jesus was going to return in their lifetime. Jesus would return and the Kingdom of God would usurp the Imperial Roman rule. The main concern for those Christians in Thessalonica was if the ones that died before the second coming would still participate in the resurrection.

In this passage Paul states that those who have died will return with Jesus. The ones that have died will come back when Jesus comes back. Paul describes this as a Parousia. The word

Parousia in Greek means a coming. A Parousia in the Greco-Roman world was an event where the people of a city, town or village would go out and greet a dignitary or conquering hero coming down the road and escort them into the city, town or village. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was a Parousia.

Paul is describing Jesus coming with the dead arising first and coming with him. Then those who are living will be caught up to meet them. Then they will be with the Lord forever.

Now in describing the second coming as a Parousia, Paul is implying that we are not swept up into heaven and stay there in the clouds, but that Jesus returns to rule over the earth. Jesus comes again to restore all creation to its original state as God intended. Jesus returns to usurp earthly rule over God's creation and establish God's Kingdom. Thus we pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." With the second coming of Jesus, God's rule on earth will be fulfilled. The Kingdom of God, the rule of God, began with the death and resurrection of Jesus and will be fulfilled with the second coming of Jesus.

So, we live in the in-between time. We live in the time between the advent of God's kingdom on earth and the final completion of God's restoration of creation. We live in the time where the Imperial rule of earthly kingdoms, Rome in Paul's day, has been confronted by the rule of God's kingdom. Whereas earthly rule is based on the acquisition of power and status, God's rule is based on love and caring for the well being of all members of society. God's rule is based on caring for all of creation, not exploiting creation. God's rule broke into the world with the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus and will be fulfilled on the day in which he comes again.

This is our hope in the in-between times, that God is restoring creation. God is transforming our lives. God is bringing the world under heavenly rule. It may not seem like it, but that is God's promise and God has been and always will be faithful to fulfill the promise. We have this hope that God is restoring creation. God is transforming lives. God is fulfilling the promise.

As we think back on the little in-between times in our lives, we see that God has gotten us through them. It may not have always been the way we wanted or expected but we have gotten through. We have gotten through as we relied on our faith and trust in God, knowing that God would fulfill the promise for our lives.

What do we do as we live in this in-between time, this time between the resurrection and the Second Coming? Do we sit back and wait? Do we search the scriptures to figure out the time and place of the coming so we can be there ready to receive him? Well that has been tried and, so far, everyone who has proclaimed that they have figured out the time and place of Jesus' second coming has been wrong. Jesus says that only the Father knows when Jesus will be sent back.

So, then do we just sit back and wait? No, then we would be like the foolish bridesmaids who were not ready when the bridegroom came and missed out on the wedding banquet. If we just sit back and wait God may very well pass us by.

We are to be like the wise bridesmaids who were prepared with extra oil for their lamps. We prepare ourselves for the Second Coming of Jesus by living in the Kingdom of God. We live our lives according to God's rule, not earthly rule. We live according to our baptismal vows: to renounce the forces of wickedness, reject evil powers, and resist evil, injustice, and oppression. We live in a way that seeks to benefit all people regardless of who they are. We work to care for this wonderful creation of God and not to exploit it for personal gain.

We strive to bring others into the Kingdom of God so that all live under the rule of God, not the rule of humans. We work to make disciples of Christ so that the world may be transformed. This may be as simple as sharing our worship service on our Facebook pages so others may hear the message we receive. It may be passing along the sermon to someone you think may need to hear the word.

We have made it through in-between times in our past. We will make it through this in-between time of pandemic by following the guidelines of our public health officials, to whom God has given the knowledge and ability to guide us by advising us to wear masks, maintain social distancing, and avoid large crowds, especially in enclosed spaces. This is our hope in this time.

We have that same hope in the greater in-between time. By maintaining our faith and reliance on God's rule over earthly rule, we prepare for the day of Christ's return. Yes we may be in the in-between time, but we will see, in this life or the next, the time of in-between end and God's creation restored.