# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

**“Alert and Clearheaded”**

**1 Thessalonians 5:1-11**

**January 30, 2022**

This morning we return to Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians. Paul evidently had been teaching the Thessalonians about the return of Jesus Christ, and they had at least some basic understanding of it, but there was some confusion about two issues. One, which Pastor McLane addressed last Sunday from chapter four of the letter, was what would happen to those who had died when Jesus returns. Paul assured them that they would be raised from the dead and join Christ together with those who were living. The second issue around which there was confusion in Thessalonica had to do with the how and the when of Christ’s return. That is the issue Paul addresses in today’s text, and I invite you to turn with me to 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Now concerning how and when all this will happen, dear brothers and sisters, we don’t really need to write you. For you know quite well that the day of the Lord’s return will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. When people are saying, “Everything is peaceful and secure,” then disaster will fall on them as suddenly as a pregnant woman’s labor pains begin. And there will be no escape. But you aren’t in the dark about these things, dear brothers and sisters, and you won’t be surprised when the day of the Lord comes like a thief. For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don’t belong to darkness and night. So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be clearheaded. Night is the time when people sleep and drinkers get drunk. But let us who live in the light be clearheaded, protected by the armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation. For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us. Christ died for us so that, whether we are dead or alive when he returns, we can live with him forever. So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

All of us seem to want a date to circle on our calendar marking Christ’s return, but we are not given that date. The disciples asked Jesus about the date, and he said that not even he knew it. Later, after his resurrection, they asked him again, and again he said that it would not be given to them. Rather, he said, go in the power of the Holy Spirit and be my witnesses. The key for us Christians is not to speculate about the how and the when of Christ’s return but to concentrate on how to live as his witnesses while we await his return.

The first thing Paul does is warn Christians that while we wait, we must not become inattentive and muddleheaded like those who live in spiritual darkness. From Jesus he borrows the image of a thief coming in the night to illustrate those who have either forgotten or simply don’t believe that Jesus is coming. While people are saying everything is safe and secure and they think they have everything under control, like a person feeling safe and secure inside his or her own house, the thief comes and robs them. For, when Jesus returns, there will not only be resurrection but there will also be judgment. And for all who are not prepared for judgment, for all who have rejected Christ, the return of Christ will lead to disaster. This is not a threat. It’s a warning that if you’re looking to yourself or your government or science or medicine or any other earthly thing for your ultimate safety and security, you will not find it. It is only found in Christ.

Therefore, you and I need to be alert and clearheaded. We need to stay awake and we need to stay sober. What’s the worst thing you can do in your car as you’re driving down the freeway? The worst thing you can do is to be impaired by alcohol and to be falling asleep at the wheel. As we journey through life as followers of Jesus Christ, we need to be alert and clearheaded with the mission he has given us to be his witnesses. We need, as Paul reminds us in this letter, to put on faith, and hope, and love. Here he describes faith and love as a breastplate and hope as a helmet. Why? Because they protect us against the dangers of thinking like the world thinks about Jesus and his return. Faith and love protect us against treating his return as something unimportant and having no real impact on our daily lives. Hope protects us against becoming discouraged and even fearful of what is happening in the world and where it is all going.

Idle curiosity, let alone declaring certainty, about dates on a calendar, and charts and books and formulas on exactly how Jesus will return and what will happen before, during, and after he does so, are just so much inattentive and muddleheaded thinking about the coming of Jesus. Alert and clearheaded readers of the Bible know that he died for us, so that whether we are dead or alive when he returns, we will live with him forever. He came, he died, he rose, and he is coming back. That is what we declare, and that is what makes us who we are as children of the light. With these words we comfort the fearful, we encourage the doubting, and we build each other up in faith, love, and hope.