

## **25 PENTECOST (LECT. 33) NOVEMBER 14, 2010 CYCLE “C”**

**TITLE: REMEMBER JESUS’ PROMISE: “NOT A HAIR OF YOUR HEAD WILL PERISH.”**

**READINGS: Mal. 4:1-2a, Ps. 98, 2Thess. 3:6-13, Luke 21:5-19**

We are rapidly approaching the end of the liturgical year. Next Sunday, with the celebration of Christ the King, the church year comes to an end. We are encouraged to consider eschatological or the end things, the second coming of Christ. We are also reminded that we, who belong to him, look forward to “that day” with joy, waiting and earnestly desiring the coming of the Lord in glory.

Our readings today all dovetail to focus on these truths of our faith. “See, the day is coming,” says Malachi, “burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up...But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. Mal.4:1-2a. Malachi gives the Israelite people hope and strength as he promises them that when they keep the law and remain faithful, they will be healed. In Psalm 98 which we pray today, again those with faith can look forward to the Lord’s coming anxiously with joy. “Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of the Lord for he is coming to judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with equity.” Ps.98:8-9.

It is in our reading from 2Thessalonians that we see the practical application of this teaching. The first century Christians had the idea that Jesus was coming again “soon and very soon” as the song puts it. For them Christ was coming again during their own lifetime. Because of their belief, some Christians in Thessalonica decided to quit work, sit around and let the community take care of them while they waited for Jesus to come. They became a burden, a pain, and as Paul puts it, “Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work.” 2Thess.3:10b-11. Paul had given them an example. When he was with them, it was the church’s responsibility to take care of him. But he wouldn’t allow that, “We were not idle when we were with you and we did not eat anyone’s bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you.” 2Thess.3:7-8. He wanted them to realize that yes, we look anxiously to the coming of the Lord, but that is not a

reason for sitting around idle. He sums it up in the last verse of our selection: "Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right." 2Thess.3:13.

It is in our Gospel pericope today that Luke reminds us the second coming is most certainly going to happen, but there is much church life to live before that event. Even today, how many times have you heard preachers interpret all the signs, attempt to lay out the events and pin point that day. Oh, if we only knew God's mind and ways! Some seem to think they have it all figured out. "Beware that you are not led astray," says Jesus, "for many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and, 'the time is near!' Do not go after them." Lk.21:8. Luke tells us yes there will be signs, wars and insurrections, nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom, earthquakes, famines and plagues. Even the temple, you think is eternal, will fall and become rubble. Doesn't that sound like our own time? But it sounds like every time, every age.

So what is our attitude? How do we react to all this? Luke tells us, "But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before Kings and governors because of my name." Lk.21:12. And if we look at Luke's second book in the Bible, the Acts of the Apostles, we will see examples of all these things he mentions and even more. The church in every age must grow through some very difficult times, endure the worst pain and suffering, just like the Lord Jesus before he entered into his glory. We, as Paul tells us, must walk his journey through the cross to gain eternal glory.

But here's the good part. No matter how difficult your journey, no matter how long it takes for Christ to come again, or what you have to go through while you wait, do not lose courage, do not weaken in your determination. Be strong in your faith, because despite all, "not a hair of your heads will perish.", "Of course, some in our congregation would say, "what do you mean, most of my hair has perished already." But Jesus is assuring us that in the midst of persecution, and even death, as our multitude of martyrs have attested, we cannot be harmed in any ultimate way. "Do not worry about anyone who can kill the body, and after that do nothing more."Lk.12:4. And Paul, using this very quote from Luke's Gospel, assures us in Acts 27:34, "Take some food, for it will help you survive; for none of you will lose a hair from your heads." Even though some of us would like that to be literally true, it means you will not lose eternity with God.

A man named John Wilson tells us about his father-in-law. He says his father-in-law was a lifelong Bible teacher. However, his father-in-law found his faith troubled in his final years. A degenerative nerve disease confined him to bed, impeding him from most of the activities that gave him pleasure. His thirty-nine-year-old daughter was battling a severe form of diabetes. Financial pressures mounted. During the most severe crisis, his father-in-law composed a Christmas letter and mailed it to others in the family. Many things that he had once taught, he now felt uneasy about. What could he believe with certainty? He came up with these three things. These were the three things he believed regardless of what life may send his way: "Life is difficult. God is merciful. Heaven is sure." These things he could count on. "Life is difficult. God is merciful. Heaven is sure." When his daughter died of diabetic complications the very next week after mailing his letter, he clung to those truths even more fiercely.

What he was saying was that though life sometimes gets tough, ultimately, not a hair on our head will perish. We are in God's hands. He will not let us fall. It is Luke who reminded us of that very truth long ago. Life is unpredictable God is with us. Not a hair on our head will perish. Or in the words of John Wilson's father-in-law: "Life is difficult. God is merciful. Heaven is sure." **Amen.**

**Pastor Barney**