

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Twenty Third Sunday after Pentecost - Year A

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Amos 5:18-24

Psalm 70

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Matthew 25:1-13

11/12/17

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew:

[Jesus said to the disciples:] 1“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. 2Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. 3When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; 4but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. 5As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. 6But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ 7Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. 8The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ 9But the wise replied, ‘No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ 10And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. 11Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ 12But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ 13Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Love

Good morning! Last Sunday we celebrated All Saints' Day. As I said then, the Lutheran church recognizes all baptized believers as saints. I also said that All Saints' Day is when we remember specifically those who have died in the past year. But it seems that evil wasn't finished last week, and death added a few more names to our list of saints. At around a little past 11:00am Devin Kelley walked into First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas. He started shooting, and when it was all finished over two dozen people were dead, including Devin.

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.¹

They were:

Dennis Neil Johnson Jr.

Sara Johns Johnson

Lula Woicinski White

¹First Thessalonians 4:13-14 (NRSV)

Annabelle Renee Pomeroy

Haley Krueger

Bryan Holcombe

Karla Holcombe

Marc Daniel Holcombe

Noah Holcombe

Crystal Holcombe and her unborn child

Emily Holcombe

Megan Holcombe

Greg Holcombe

Ricardo Rodriguez

Theresa Rodriguez

Brooke Bryanne Ward

Emily Garcia

Shani Louise Corrigan

Robert Michael Corrigan

Robert Scott Marshall

Karen Sue Marshall

Keith Allen Braden

Tara E. McNulty

Peggy Lynn Warden²

²<http://abc13.com/full-list-of-texas-church-shooting-victims-identified/2607282/>

*13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.*³

Paul's words in First Thessalonians ring with hope for us this morning. You see, the church in Thessalonica, the city to where first Thessalonians was addressed, was worried. Paul's letters pre-date the writing of the Gospels, and so when we read them we are getting a glimpse of how the early church handled different problems and challenges in its very infancy. Now, the big thing that was on every Christian's mind at this time was the *parousia*. This Greek word meant presence or arrival or official visit, but had been adopted by Christians to refer to the second coming of Christ. And the early church thought that this was going to happen soon... like yesterday... "why hasn't it happened yet?!"

This is why the advice on things like marriage can be tricky in the New Testament. Paul thought the world was about to end, so what's the point in getting married? In fact, this mentality shaped much of the early church's thinking, don't get too attached, don't worry, 'cause Christ is coming back soon, and as the joke goes, you better look busy. But then something happened... Days went by, then weeks, then months and eventually years, and still Jesus hadn't shown up. Eventually people started to get old or sick, eventually dying. The church in Thessalonica wasn't ready for this and didn't know what to expect. What did the death of family or loved ones mean? Especially of those who were believers? Do they miss out on the *parousia*? No, Paul writes, we all will share in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we will rejoice together. In fact, what he says is

³First Thessalonians 4:13-14 (NRSV)

some sort of creedal statement. We use the creeds to proclaim what we stand for, a sort of mission statement that captures our theology. So when Paul writes “*For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, God will bring with him those who have died.*”⁴ We see the witness of a larger community. Scholars point to things like the use of the plural “we” which would suggest that this is something that is larger than just Paul’s vocabulary. No, this is something bigger than Paul, a statement that holds within it the hope of the whole church.

“Use these words for the encouragement of one another,” Paul urges. What’s so powerful about this is that it doesn’t dismiss our pain and our grief. So often when someone dies you hear cheesy phrases like “God doesn’t give you more than you can handle” or “Don’t cry, they’re in a better place.” You won’t find any of that language in the Bible and as I’ve said before, if anyone uses it when you lose a loved one, you have my permission to kick them in the shin. No, as Beverly Gaventa writes:

*“Paul does not discourage grief with pious nonsense to the effect that Christians should not grieve because they know their loved ones will be with God. Instead he recognizes the reality of grief, but distinguishes the Christian’s grief from that of others who do not know of the Lord’s return... (Paul) places the story of those who have died within the context of what God is doing in the world. Their story has meaning as part of God’s story... Paul does not instruct the Thessalonians to be moderate in their grief or to cease manifestations of grief. Instead, he urges them to reframe it, to see its relationship to the future God intends.”*⁵

And what might that future look like? Well I’m glad you asked:

⁴First Thessalonians 4:14 (NRSV)

⁵Gaventa, Beverly R. *First and Second Thessalonians*. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1998. pp. 67-68

*13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. 15 For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. 16 For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.*⁶

Amen.

⁶ First Thessalonians 4:13-18 (NRSV)