

Third Sunday of End Times Saints Triumphant – November 16, 2014
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. 14) **For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.** 15) According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16) For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17) After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. **18) Therefore encourage one another with these words.**

Dear Friends:

A lack of information often results in becoming worried or afraid. A child might be afraid to go to a new school because they don't know what it will be like. If the child and their parents go to visit the school and meet the teachers they won't be quite so afraid. The people in the church at Thessalonica were missing some information. They were worried and concerned about what would happen to Christians who died before Jesus returned again in glory. It appears that Paul may not have had the opportunity to completely explain about the resurrection of the dead when he was teaching in Thessalonica. Or it may have been the Thessalonians forget what Paul had taught them. That happens to us. We forget some of the lessons we've learned in Sunday School or Confirmation classes or in weekly sermons. That's why we need to continue to study God's Word over and over again.

When Paul heard about the questions the Thessalonians had; he wrote the words of our text so that they would no longer be uninformed and confused about what would take place when Jesus would return. After explaining things to them he told them: ***Encourage one another with these words.***

The Holy Spirit has preserved these Words for us so that we can:

Theme: Encourage Each Other With These Words ...

1. We believe that Jesus died and rose
2. We believe that those who died in Christ will be raised to life
3. We believe that we will be with the Lord forever

It's sometimes hard to know what to say when someone dies. However, when a Christian dies we have the words of our text that we can use to comfort those who are saddened by the loss of their loved one.

Death was not part of God's plan for human beings when he created them. He wanted them to live forever – but Adam and Eve sinned and **so sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned**—(Romans 5:12). Death is a reminder of our sinfulness. It reminds us that we need a Savior.

The Thessalonians, like us, knew that they had a Savior who gave them the hope of eternal life. That is why Paul says: **Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. 14) For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.**

Remember, Paul says, we have a living Savior who gives us hope so that we don't have grief like people who have no hope. It's natural and normal to be sad when someone dies. It's even natural and normal to cry when someone dies. When Jesus' friend Lazarus died – the Bible tells us that Jesus was so sad that he wept. But our tears and sadness won't have to last forever. And why is that? It's because Christ died for our sins. He took our place under God's wrath – the righteous for the unrighteous. That means that death is not a punishment for the Christian. Jesus came to rescue sinners from the punishment of sin -- which was death.

When Jesus comforted Martha the sister of his friend Lazarus he told her: (John 11:25) **Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.** The most important truth in the Bible is the truth that Jesus rose from the dead. It is that truth which proves that Jesus is the son of God, that Jesus defeated sin, Satan and the Devil. It is the resurrection of Jesus that assures us of our own resurrection. Paul explains this in (1 Corinthians 15:20-23) **But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21) For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22) For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23) But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.**

Over and over again in the Bible – the resurrection of Christ is used to encourage people. Paul tells us to encourage each other with his words. He wants us to educate each other so that no one is uninformed. Keep on talking about Jesus. Keep on telling each other that Jesus died and rose again. Dear friends, we can't say it enough. Jesus died for us. Jesus rose for us. He died for me. He rose for me. He died for you. He rose for you.

Those words encourage us not just when we're trying to deal with the loss of a loved one who has died in the Lord. Those words encourage us whenever we are struggling to overcome the disappointments, the difficulties, the trials of life in this world. Jesus died. The sins I'm struggling with and feeling bad about have already been paid for. Jesus rose. That means that there's more than life in this world. We have an eternity of joy awaiting us and we know that our hope will be disappointed because Jesus rose. Therefore the resurrection serves to encourage us to move forward – confident that we are God's forgiven children and heirs of eternal life.

And when we are confronted with the death of a loved one – the death and resurrection of Christ provides us with a special encouragement.

2. We believe that those who died in Christ will be raised to life

We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15) According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16) For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

Last week in our sermon we listened as Jesus painted us a picture of what would happen on the last day. We even heard Jesus tell us what he would say and do on the last day. Perhaps Paul has those words or similar words in mind when he says in our text: **According to the Lord's own word.**

When Paul speaks about the resurrection from the dead – he's not just expressing his own ideas or dreams. He's using the Lord's own promises to encourage us. Apparently, the Thessalonians were worried that if someone died before Jesus returned to take the Christians to live with him in heavenly glory – that they would miss this blessing. However, that's not the case. Paul assures us that the Lord has told us that he will come down from heaven and that he will call forth from the grave the bodies of those who have died and been buried.

So before anything else happens the dead will be raised to live. Their bodies which were left behind and buried when their souls were taken to be the Lord will be reunited with their souls. They will live again. Then and only then; will the Lord also gather the believers who are still alive to be with him. So don't worry, Paul says. The dead in Christ will be raised to life. All of this will take place in the "blink of an eye" – in a flash. What a joyous moment this will be.

Encourage each other with these things. Remind each other of the resurrection often while you are still living. Remind each other of the resurrection of the body as you comfort one another at a funeral. Encourage each other with reminders of the resurrection as you visit with those who miss a husband, a wife, a child who has gone to be with the Lord. You will see those who have died in the Lord again. You will be with them again. But more importantly you will see Christ and you will be with Christ.

1. We believe that Jesus died and rose
2. We believe that those who died in Christ will be raised to life and
3. We also believe that we will be with the Lord forever.

Our belief that we will be with the Lord forever is based on our Lord's own promise. (John 14:2-3) **My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.** (John 14:6) **Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life..."**

And so Paul writes: **After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.**

Surely we will be excited to see our loved ones again but what will be even more exciting is that we and they will be reunited to meet the Lord. Paul says we'll be caught up with them in the clouds. When Jesus ascended up into heaven we are told that Jesus was taken up into heaven as his disciples were watching and that a cloud hid him from their sight. When Jesus returns he'll lift us up to himself – removing us from this present earth which will be destroyed.

When we hear Bible stories about Jesus – we might try to imagine what it must have been like to be with Jesus when he was on this earth. How wonderful it must have been to have been with him when he fed the crowds of people with just five loaves of bread and two fish. How exciting it must have been to see Lazarus walking out of the grave when Jesus called him back to life. Dear friends, we're going to be able to meet Jesus – not in his humble state as the God-man who came here to suffer but in his glorified state as the God-man who rules over all creation.

And when we meet him we won't be embarrassed or ashamed or afraid to stand before him. He's removed our fears by removing our sins. He's our brother. And when we meet him he will give us a glorified body that will be like the bodies we have now – but without the sinful nature, imperfections and weakness. It will be a body which is fit and able to live for all eternity – a body like the body of our risen Savior so that we will be able to live with him forever in the joy and peace of eternal life.

Now that you know these things and have been reminded of them again take heart. You don't have to be afraid of your own death. Jesus is your Savior. Those who die in Christ are really asleep in Jesus. While their bodies sleep in the dust of the earth the body is unaware of anything which is going on around it. But when the Lord wakes the body up on the last day – the body will use all of it's abilities and senses again. We aren't afraid to put our head down on a pillow at night and go to sleep. We do so looking forward to a new day.

That's how death is. We don't need to fear putting our head down on the pillow of death and falling asleep because we know that Jesus will wake us up to a glorious new eternal day.
That's the hope and confidence we have because

1. We believe that Jesus died and rose
2. We believe that those who died in Christ will be raised to life
3. We believe that we will be with the Lord forever

Therefore encourage one another with these things. Especially those who have lost a loved one to the sleep of death. You can say so much more than simply expressing your regrets or sorrow. You can comfort them as a fellow believer with the simple facts about the dead in Christ and the coming of our Lord: Christ rose and promises us we will rise also; death is but a sleep from which Christ will wake us; at his coming all believers will be reunited to meet with Christ and to live with him forever.

CW 406

This is the threefold truth on which our faith depends;
And with this joyful cry worship begins and ends:
Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!

On this we fix our minds as, standing side by side,
We take the bread and wine, take him, the Crucified:
Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!

By this we are upheld when doubt or grief assails
Our Christian faith and love, and only grace avails:
Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again! Amen.