



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Sunday, November 6-12 (A) – 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Focus: *Declare the Word of the Lord*

word of life

“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.” 1 Thessalonians 4:13 (NRSV)

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

The first followers of Jesus, including Paul, expected Jesus to return within their own lifetime. This was based in part on Jesus’ own understanding about his return. (See Matthew 24:29-35, Mark 9:1; 13:24-30, and Luke 21:25-33.) Jesus thought he would return *soon*. But then again, God’s understanding of *soon* appears to be different than those of us who walk on this earth.

1. *How does God measure time?*
2. *What does “soon” mean to God?*

The Thessalonians are concerned if those who recently died have missed their chance to be part of the kingdom of God and eternal life. Thus there was a double grief—the grief when someone we love dies, but also the concern of forever losing that person because he or she died before Christ comes again. We can only imagine the confusion when first-century Christians died before seeing Jesus.

3. *Do you expect to see Jesus in your lifetime?*
4. *If you knew Jesus was coming this week, what might you do before he arrives?*
5. *Would you make any changes in your lifestyle?*

In the fourth chapter of his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul addresses these questions and the rising anxiety associated with grief in Thessalonica. Questions about death and the after-life are not restricted to first century Christians. Most of us wonder about death and what comes next. Sometimes, we voice those questions aloud, but often we deny death and press on with living.

6. *What questions do you have about death and beyond?*
7. *What do you believe happens to Christians when they die?*

Paul is passionate in his response. He does not want his beloved congregation in Thessalonica to be uninformed and left without hope. Those who are not connected to Christ and the promised resurrection may experience despair, living without hope. Paul assures our connection with Christ goes beyond death. The words from Romans ring out, “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39 NRSV)

When Jesus returns he will bring those who died. Take hope. Death is not the end of the story. Death does not have the final word. Thanks be to God.

8. *What does death mean for the Christian?*
9. *How have you experienced hope at a Christian funeral?*

Paul imagines the return of Jesus to be with the sound of a trumpet and the sight of Christ descending from the clouds. Then, we will be with the Lord forever.

10. *How do you imagine the return of Christ?*
11. *How might his return be a motivating factor to live an ethical life?*

word *among us*

Everyone in town knew and loved Grammy. Although she never married or had children, she had plenty of adopted children and grandchildren. She treated everyone she met like they were part of her family. She knew no strangers.

It was hard to find anyone who didn't refer to her as Grammy. In fact, not many knew her real name. She was Grammy to all. Her hair had been white since her early twenties, casting a wise mantle on her shoulders.

Grammy was determined to live to age 97, and then she was ready to die. She started planning her funeral at age 95, but had to change her plans several times because she outlived a few of the pallbearers. Sure enough, shortly after her 97th birthday, she died. Her funeral was filled with Easter hymns and celebration. She wanted her parting gift to her friends to point to Christ, the One who sustained her in this life.

1. *Does Granny remind you of anyone?*
2. *What is unique about a Christian funeral?*
3. *Has your attitude (over the years) changed about attending funerals? Explain.*

Paul wanted the Thessalonians to encourage one another—especially at times of grief.

4. *What words have you found helpful to hear at the time of death of a loved one?*
5. *What is less helpful to hear?*

faith practice *in daily life*

Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed.

Paul knew the Thessalonians were struggling with life and death issues. They believed in Christ, but did not understand why Jesus did not return. Or rather, they were confused why their loved ones were allowed to die before the return of Christ.

Through a letter, Paul proclaimed good news. He could not personally be with the Thessalonians for conversation and prayer. Instead his written words of hope and encouragement were sent in a letter along with his prayers and love.

6. *When have you received words in a card or letter that lifted your spirit?*
7. *In what ways do you try to proclaim the good news of God at the time of death?*

We have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of forever in our baptism. God claims us and supports us during the joys and sorrows of this life. Even if we try to run to the ends of the earth to avoid God, we cannot outrun God's grace. Not even death can separate us from the love of Christ.

8. *What do you hope to remember from this lesson?*

Prayer

Holy One, hold me close today and every day in life and in death. Amen

last word

Take time this week
to send someone a message of hope in Christ.



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