

Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2017

## The Second Sunday before Advent

Red or Green



### Collect

Heavenly Father, whose blessed Son was revealed to destroy the works of the devil and to make us the children of God and heirs of eternal life: grant that we, having this hope, may purify ourselves even as he is pure; that when he shall appear in power and great glory we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom; where he is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

### 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

**COMMENT:** Paul states clearly how Christians are to conduct themselves while waiting patiently for Christ’s second coming. For those who believe, this waiting is a most hopeful, redemptive experience because Christ died for us. Paul derived many of his metaphors in this passage from typical Jewish eschatology of the period. We find similar metaphorical language in the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran. It is a mistake to take the metaphors literally as some do. Eschatological passages in the Gospels also contain this same kind of metaphors. “The Day of the Lord” was also a prominent element of earlier eschatological prophecy in the OT. In traditional Jewish thought it was deemed to be both a time for hope and salvation and a time for judgment. Hence the contrasting metaphors of light and darkness featured so prominently in all this type of literature. A primary aspect of this type of writing was the uncertainty of the timing of the event. It has been suggested that Paul was being ironic and in vv. 1-3 actually repeating some of the statements he had heard from the Thessalonians themselves. Had some of them boasted that they knew the day when it would all come to pass? In verses 6-7 was he rebuking them for some unseemly behaviour, slacking in the rigours of the

Christian life as they waited for the day of the Lord to dawn? In difficult times through the ages credulous Christians have been known to do just that, both guessing the date of the dreadful day and living carelessly because they believed that the time was so short. Paul's particular message for the Thessalonians is found in verses 8-10. A life manifesting faith, love and mutual support leads to the ultimate goal of being in the presence of God in this life and in life beyond death. This is the gift of salvation that comes to us by God's grace in Jesus Christ.

**Matthew 25:14-30** English Standard Version (ESV)

### The Parable of the Talents

25<sup>14</sup> “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants<sup>[a]</sup> and entrusted to them his property. <sup>15</sup>To one he gave five talents,<sup>[b]</sup> to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. <sup>16</sup>He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. <sup>17</sup>So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. <sup>18</sup>But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. <sup>19</sup>Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup>And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.’ <sup>21</sup>His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.<sup>[c]</sup> You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ <sup>22</sup>And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.’ <sup>23</sup>His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ <sup>24</sup>He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed,<sup>25</sup> so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ <sup>26</sup>But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? <sup>27</sup>Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. <sup>28</sup>So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. <sup>29</sup>For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. <sup>30</sup>And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

**Footnotes:** a. Greek *bondservants*; also verse 19. b. A *talent* was a monetary unit worth about twenty years' wages for a labourer. c. Greek *bondservant*; also verses 23, 26, 30.

**COMMENT:** The parable of the talents also deals with Christ's expected return, but in a different way. He is to come not merely to establish the reign of God, but to judge those

who have been spiritually faithful and those who have not. This is a story which, like so many of the parables, exaggerates a simple action to emphasize its meaning. Not only would the action of the master appear outrageous to those who heard the story, the amount of money involved was so great as to raise doubts about his sanity. In those days, a talent would have been equal to about fifteen years' wages for a labourer. Furthermore, would a wise master have entrusted so much wealth to slaves? While this was an exorbitant sum of money, the meaning of the parable has nothing to do with money. The issue is faithfulness, not how one attends to investments. The reward given to the dutiful servants also causes one to wonder about the fairness of the story's outcome. The rather sad end of the story is the clue, however harsh and unjust it may seem to us. Again it must be seen as exaggeration for effect. Yet it disturbed ancient interpreters as much as is still disturbs modern minds. Nonetheless, severe as it appears to us, the parable drives home the point that God's final judgment is a real and significant element of our Christian tradition. God's grace is not to be wasted, but used as an opportunity to develop one's moral and spiritual life. The issue is not so much that of missing an opportunity, but of losing it. Placed as it is in Matthew's Gospel just prior to the Passion story, this parable and the two which accompany it undergird the urgency of the matter. Spiritual life brings a responsibility of momentous import to each person and to every Christian fellowship.

## **Psalm 90** *Domine, refugium* Grail Psalter

**℟̥ O Lord, you have been our refuge from one generation to the next.**

<sup>1</sup> *Prayer of Moses, the man of God.*

O Lord, you have been our refuge  
from one generation to the next.

<sup>2</sup> Before the mountains were born  
or the earth or the world brought forth,  
you are God, without beginning or end. ℟̥

<sup>3</sup> You turn men back to dust  
and say: "Go back, sons of men."

<sup>4</sup> To your eyes a thousand years  
are like yesterday, come and gone,  
no more than a watch in the night. ℟̥

<sup>5</sup> You sweep men away like a dream,  
like the grass which springs up in the morning.

<sup>6</sup> In the morning it springs up and flowers:  
by evening it withers and fades. ℟̥

<sup>7</sup> So we are destroyed in your anger,  
struck with terror in your fury.

<sup>8</sup> Our guilt lies open before you;  
our secrets in the light of your face. ℟̥

<sup>9</sup> All our days pass away in your anger.  
Our life is over like a sigh.

<sup>10</sup> Our span is seventy years,  
or eighty for those who are strong. ℟̥

And most of these are emptiness and pain.  
They pass swiftly and we are gone.

<sup>11</sup> Who understands the power of your anger  
and fears the strength of your fury?

**℟ O Lord, you have been our refuge from one generation to the next.**

<sup>12</sup> Make us know the shortness of our life  
that we may gain wisdom of heart.

<sup>13</sup> Lord, relent! Is your anger for ever?  
Show pity to your servants. **℟**

**Glory be to the Father, and to the Son :  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be :  
world without end. Amen.**

**COMMENT:** This psalm may originally have existed in two different parts, verses 1-12 and 13-17, but scholars who adopt that view are not too sure just where to separate the two. The most natural break would seem to come at the end of verse 12, thus making this reading an excerpt from both parts. Its title in the Hebrew Scriptures, “A prayer of Moses, the man of God,” gave it a supreme distinction rather than definitive authorship. Hence it was placed at the beginning of the fourth collection of the Psalter. Of all the psalms this one may have greater familiarity for most church people because of its frequent use in the service of Christian burial. The theme of the poem is the eternity of God in contrast to the transitory nature of human life. One is reminded of similar beautiful passages of the unnamed prophet of the Babylonian exile (cf. Isaiah 40–55) which also expressed the same prophetic message. Can the similarity of Isa. 40:6-8 and Psalm 90:5-6 be accidental? Beginning with the affirmation of the permanence of God in verses 1-2, the psalmist delved deeply into the fragile and ephemeral quality of human life. In verse 12 he drew the natural conclusion that wisdom brings to every reflective person of faith. The shortness of life compels one to make wise use of our brief span of years. In the latter part of the poem, the psalmist returns to the original theme and acknowledges how dependent we are on the compassion and steadfast love of God (verses 13-15).

### **Post Communion**

Gracious Lord, in this holy sacrament you give substance to our hope: bring us at the last to that fullness of life for which we long; through Jesus Christ our Saviour. **Amen**

### **The Blessing**

Christ our King make you faithful and strong to do his will, that you may reign with him in glory; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among *you*, and remain with *you* always. **Amen.**