

Coming Unannounced

I Thessalonians 5:1-11

From my living room window last Sunday, I think it's safe to assume, "It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas!" And if last Sunday is any indication of what the Sundays in Advent will look and feel like, I may actually reach my goal of getting Christmas cards sent out on time this year. Weather has a great deal to do with mood. Montana weather sets the tone for times and seasons in the Treasure State. This marking of time influenced by weather systems and ever-changing mood swings keeps Christians perpetually looking forward. You don't have to worry about what gifts to wrap for your spouse or girlfriend last year. That's already happened! It's in your rearview mirror. Past. Done. Over with. History. Think of what you and I need to accomplish today, and what about tomorrow? Keep looking forward, preparing for what will come and what will be.

Themes of darkness and light, sleeping and waking, sobriety and drunken stupor highlight the Lord's coming again. The first century Christian Church fully anticipated an imminent return of Christ. The Apostle Paul does not want his members to be uninformed, but ready. And the same can be said of us in the waning days of 2020. Jesus is coming unannounced on this great and dreadful day of the Lord. Zephaniah bears this out in big, bold letters. You cannot pinpoint it on your calendars. You cannot set your iPod or activate your electronic alarms for this most eventful Guest. You simply must look forward to its dawning as people of light who are awake and sober. Morning, noon, and night...always vigilant and ever-prepared, the Christian remains in a posture of bright-eyed faith.

The unbelieving world remains in perpetual darkness, sleeping off the previous night's drunken binge. Meanwhile, the thief comes and robs you blind. The faithless won't even know they've been

robbed until its too late. The damage will have been done. The loss will be significant. The regret of “should of, would of, could of” will be felt in a never-ending hell. There is no “do over” in hell. There’s no “mulligan” once the Lord appears in glory. Therefore, seize the day! “NOW is the acceptable time; behold, NOW is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2b). You’ve got no time to lose. Get your house in order TODAY.

Of course, coming unannounced leaves one longing for some kind of reliable insurance, some form of sure-fire security, a peace of mind policy one can take to the bank. One notable insurance company urges its policy holders to be protected “from mayhem, like me.” Because we are physically unable to remain vigilant every moment of the day or night on account of our mortal natures, we must by necessity look outside ourselves for help in this matter. Incapable of doing that which is required in a 24/7/365 alert, we necessarily rely on our brave men and women in blue to have our backs. Firefighters and EMT’s stand the watch, allowing us peaceful sleep and rest for the hours to come. Thank God for first responders!

But what of your spiritual preparedness? What of the coming that remains unannounced and unknown? How will you ever be like the ever-ready bunny this side of eternity’s gates? Calling out the National Guard for the day of the Lord is an exercise in futility. Even the minutemen won’t last a minute when the all-powerful barrage of destruction and fury reign down. God help us all!

Take heart; be of good cheer! You have that peace which the world cannot give, even in the midst of that which you do not know. Paul exhorts us to put on the breastplate of faith and love along with your helmet—the hope of salvation. Since the day of the Lord’s coming is unannounced and outside the realm of our exact knowing, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself provides you this holy protection, this equipment of the Spirit, so as to keep your hearts and your minds forward-thinking and fully prepared.

The breastplate is like unto those all important and all-impressive Kevlar vests worn by the soldier in the heat of battle. Bull

riders don these protective insurance measures before they mount 1 ton sticks of dynamite. Designed to wrap around the vital organs needed for life and breath, in the same way faith and love wrap around our hearts and keep us always and ever confirmed in Christ. Whether immersed in thick darkness or blinded by light, whether sleeping or waking, or somewhere in-between, your heart and mine keep ticking and pumping the life-blood of Christ crucified and risen through our veins. Faith and love mingle with hope in a triad of divine preparedness.

The purpose of the helmet requires little explanation. What it does require is usage. God gives you a helmet to be worn. Don't leave home without it. When disasters strike, the best weapon we have is our heads. Helmets allow us to clearly assess the situation and act accordingly. Wear your helmet! The hope of salvation grants you a calm in the storm that the faithless unbelieving do not share. This hope is ours in Christ Jesus, who suffered the mayhem of the cross and died for you so that you might share an eternity with Him. Ours is a hope that reaches far beyond the disastrous day of the Lord unannounced to the dawn of a new and everlasting day.

Remember, dear Christian, that God has put two eyes in front of your head for good reason (unless you're a mother, then you have been blessed with two sets of eyes in front and back). Keep looking forward! Always be scanning the horizon for Jesus' return. Christian hope is an eager yearning for what is to come because of what Christ has already done. Wear your helmet! Strap on your breastplate! Be always prepared in season and out of season for the unannounced but ever-certain coming of the Lord.

St. Paul again exhorts us with these words: "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" (verses 9, 10). Prepared in Christ, God has not destined you or I for wrath, even though wrath is our just reward according to the Law. Christ Jesus has died in utter darkness to take away your sins, and with these sins the full wrath to come. His advent brings us holy joy and great relief because whether

awake or asleep at His coming we are children of light and of the day. What relief He bears! What holy assurance He brings! “Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing” (verse 11).

Yes, indeed, it’s beginning to look and feel a lot like Christmas in the winter wonderland of Montana. Are you ready for its coming? Are you prepared for Jesus’ birthday? Are you anxious for the new birth of water and the Spirit in Baptism that brings you eternal life and forgiveness? Armed with breastplate and fitted with helmet you will be ready for anything. Amen.

And the peace that passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds firmly fixed on Christ Jesus, who comes to save. Amen.