Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 27
Year A

Amos 5:18-24
Psalm 70
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Matthew 25:1-13

Last week we remembered many friends and loved ones who have died. Why do we do that? What is the point? What does it say about us?

Like the people of Thessalonica, we are looking for something else – a new future. They were looking for the return of Jesus in the very near future – within their lifetime. Therefore, they had questions regarding their loved ones who had died. They wanted to know if their loved ones would be included when Jesus returned. That was the issue Paul was addressing. However, there is much for us also.

The bottom line for the Thessalonians was hope – hope for their loved ones. I think that is our bottom line also. We remember our loved ones because we have hope of the resurrection, just like they did. We yearn for the assurance that all will be well for our loved ones and for us. While we do not expect Jesus to return at any moment, perhaps we should.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus discusses the delay of the return of the bridegroom. Just previous to this, Jesus told another parable about the master returning at an unexpected time. In both of these stories, Jesus is warning the people to expect the return of Jesus when we least expect it. I have told you the story before of my father in a meeting with the bishop when the bishop asked each person if they thought Jesus was going to return immediately. When they all said no, the bishop responded that such was the time Jesus would return – when no one expected it.

In today's story, we are told to be prepared, to be watching and waiting. But we are also told to be patient. Jesus told His followers that even He did not know when the time would come. How should we know? But, unlike the slave in the earlier story who beat his fellow slaves when the master was delayed, we need to live as if Jesus was coming now. But, like the wise virgins in today's story, we need to be prepared for any delay. How do we prepare?

First, we are to prepare ourselves, we are to be informed, and do the work we are called to do. We are to study the scriptures, pray, and be about God's work. Throughout His ministry, Jesus told parables invoking labor – sowing seeds, harvesting, tending flocks. These are not tales of idleness.

Next, we are to encourage one another. That is how Paul ends the passage today. We are to lift each other up when we are down or discouraged. God never promises us that everything will go according to our plans. Sometimes we get a little ahead of God and expect different outcomes. When things don't work out as we expect, we need a little boost. God's timetable is not ours. That is what the people of Thessalonica learned, and we are still trying to learn that lesson.

Finally, we are to pray without ceasing. I think we can all agree that there is much for us to pray about. Perhaps if we develop a habit of ceaseless prayer, we can begin to understand that God is in control. We don't have to fix it. We are to trust God.

Paul told the people of Thessalonica that all would be well with their loved ones. Jesus told those listening to Him to be patient but also prepared. God is telling us today that all will be well of our loved ones and for us. As we seek to do God's will, God will provide for us.