

Caught By Surprise
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11
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Rev. Steve McCoy
First United Methodist Church
Marquette, MI

You know, sometimes Paul can be a condescending you know what! He starts off right away here in chapter 5 of 1 Thessalonians. He says “concerning the days and the seasons you do not need to have anything written to you.” Then he uses the next ten verses to write to them about what they don’t need to have written about. Thanks for the subtle reminder, but I thought we already knew. Is Paul writing to prove how smart he is? Well yes and no. While Paul overall is pleased with what is going on in the church there at Thessalonica, he is also very aware of the temptations that are there for the most ardent believers, even more so for a new community such as that church. More important is that he also knew there would be new hearers of the word, which would reinforce what was also being taught. Little I think, did Paul know, some of those new hearers would be us.

So what is it that we hear? Paul is talking about being prepared for the time when Jesus will return. There is not going to be a warning or a pronouncement but instead it will come quickly like a thief in the night. We will have more on that next week, but the message for us here is that we are to live our lives for God each and every day so that we are not caught by surprise.

So many times in this day in age, we have individualized our faith and compartmentalized ourselves to where we think we can figure this all out on our own. We read the Bible through our own egocentric, Amero-centric, lenses, and think that is what the scriptures and salvation are all about me. Much of our current financial struggles today I think can be traced back to this attitude that we think we can do it all on our own and that as long as we are serving our own purposes what harm could come? Well we can see how all things are related, where the more it cost to for fuel, the more it costs to buy food, and the more it costs to buy food the less we have to get other things until eventually we discover that the resources are in fact finite. We must be willing to share with one another for the good of the whole. Because just when we think we have prosperity or Peace and security as Paul says, then sudden destruction will come. The signs were there, but were they ignored. Living in the light means being aware of not only our own needs and reaching out to support the needs of others together.

What we can never have enough reminding of is that when we live in the light, using the sober judgment of faith, we can see clearly that God wants us to live and work in a way, that builds one another up, and does not build ourselves up at the others expense. When we live that way everyone loses. But if we live in the

light of faith then we are not surprised but prepared to deal with the tragedies and tribulations of life. We are prepared to encounter the living Christ in the most unexpected of places because that is who God is calling us to be. Paul gives them and us a reminder to encourage one another and to build one another up.

Richard Gribble writes of an encounter he had at an international gathering of youth which met for a full week to discuss how better to promulgate Christ's message to the world. Those assembled for the conference read many informative essays, heard many fine speakers, watched a few videos, and had ample time to discuss with each other. As the conference was beginning to break up and the those attending were packing to leave, a young woman from East Africa arose and said, "In my country when we hear that a pagan village is ready to accept the Gospel we don't send books, videos, a Bible or even an evangelist. Rather we send the best Christian family we can find because we have found that the example of a good family speaks louder and more clearly than all the books, speeches, and videos in the world."

Gribble goes on to say that "The truly important things in life are generally the intangibles, like the way we present ourselves to others. The one that is often forgotten and undoubtedly the most important is our faith. It is only through faith that we come together as a community to give thanks to God this day. It is our faith in peoples, institutions, and ideas which allows our society to progress. As we gather around the dining room table and celebrate with family, friends, and loved ones, sharing the produce of the land, let us be mindful of the great gifts God has given us."¹

Paul is reminding them and us of how they are living. What example are we setting. Will we be caught by surprise when we encounter someone who is ready to receive Christ? Or will our living and example as one in ministry be enough. Will our stewardship and our attitude show that we live in the light and that we do not trust in ourselves but trust in the grace of God for working all the good we can, in this world? Let us not be caught by surprise, but let us encourage one another and build one another up in the light of faith, so that we will be strong in the faith, and it will be evident in all that God calls us to be. Amen.

¹ Richard E. Gribble, CSC, Sundays after Pentecost: Conversion to Christ, CSS Publishing Company