

The Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Trinity – Pr. Faugstad sermon
1 Thessalonians 4:31-18: “The Lord of Life Will Awaken the Dead.”
November 9/10, 2024 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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O almighty and everlasting God, by Your dear Son You have promised us forgiveness of our sins and deliverance from eternal death: We pray that by Your Holy Spirit You will daily increase our faith in Your grace through Christ, and establish in us the certain hope that we shall not die, but peacefully sleep, and be raised on the last day to eternal life and salvation; through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, by Veit Dietrich, p. 164)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the fourth chapter of St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Thessalonians. We read selected verses in Jesus’ name:

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep. / For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. ^(ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, whose work and word is life for us, dear fellow redeemed:

Jairus was desperate. His daughter, just twelve years old, was sick, and she wasn’t getting better. The doctors said there was nothing more they could do. Her parents’ hearts were broken; their tears flowed. They would gladly have taken her place. They would die if only she could live. They felt hopeless. Then Jairus learned that Jesus had just come to the area. He hurried to meet Him, knelt before Him, and begged Him to lay His healing hand on the girl so she would live. Jesus agreed to go. Jairus felt a glimmer of hope.

But while they were on their way, a friend from Jairus’ home met them with terrible news, “Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher any more” (Luk. 8:49). They were too late. The girl’s time had run out. Her soul had left her body and gone to be with the Lord. Her body lay at rest. But then Jesus turned to Jairus in his anguish and said something strange, “Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well” (v. 50). They kept going. When they got to the house, a great crowd had gathered, “weeping and wailing loudly” (Mar. 5:38). Jesus now addressed them. “Do not weep,” He said, “Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping” (Luk. 8:52, Mat. 9:24).

The people in the crowd did not respond like Jairus did. They laughed at Jesus. It was not a laugh of joy or even of surprise. It was a laugh that showed their offense at Jesus' words and their disdain for His message. They knew the difference between sleep and death! They knew the signs: her heart had stopped, she wasn't breathing, her skin had gone cold. There was no doubt about it – the girl was dead.

And no doubt she was. But just like the people today who tell us to "trust science" since nothing can be verified apart from science, the people in the crowd failed to account for the power of God. Death was too powerful for the people to overcome, but it wasn't too powerful for Jesus. They were helpless in the face of death, but Jesus was not.

Jesus sent the crowd out of the house and approached the girl's bedside. She lay there so still, so peaceful, while all around her was so much pain and sadness. Jesus reached down, took her by the hand, and said two words in Aramaic, "*Talitha cumi,*" which means, "*Little girl, I say to you, arise*" (Mar. 5:41). Immediately the girl got up and started walking.

You and I have also stood at the side of deceased people before. We have seen them lying there peacefully, maybe even touched their hands. We looked at their faces and wished that their eyes might open, that they would start breathing again, that they would step out of the casket and be reunited with us. Why doesn't God do this for us? Why doesn't He work a miracle? It's obvious that He can. Nothing is impossible for Him (Luk. 1:37).

But He does not call us to put our hope in what He can do or might do. He calls us to trust in what He has promised. And He does promise to raise our loved ones from the dead, even if it is not as soon as we want. The inspired words of 1 Thessalonians address this pain of loss and the difficulty of waiting for the day of our final redemption. St. Paul wrote to the Thessalonian Christians, "*we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.*"

It is clear that these Christians were concerned that some among them were dying before the return of Jesus. Would these believers lose out on their chance to be in heaven with glorified body and soul? "No," says Paul echoing the words of Jesus, "they are only sleeping. *Through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep.*" But how could they be certain of this? Where was the proof? They needed to look no further than Jesus, who "*died and rose again.*"

When Jesus died on Good Friday, no one called that a sleep. The soldiers found Him dead on the cross and thrust a spear into His side to make sure of it. Joseph and Nicodemus took down His body, put it in a new tomb, and sealed the tomb with a big stone. No one expected Jesus to come out again. The women made plans to return for a better burial. But everything changed on Easter Sunday. Everything changed for Jesus' disciples who saw Him alive that day, and everything changed that day for you and me as we approach our own death.

Paul writes that the One who died and rose again, who triumphed over death, is going to return to raise us from the dead. He is going to come and wake us up, just as though we had been sleeping, just as He woke up the little girl. "*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God.*" We think of

Jesus coming on the clouds with all the angels. But did you remember this passage which says He will come down with a shout, *“with a cry of command”*?

What is it that He will cry out? Perhaps we have an insight from Jesus raising the young man from Nain to life when He said, *“Young man, I say to you, arise”* (Luk. 7:14). Or when He called to his friend Lazarus in the tomb, *“Lazarus, come out”* (Joh. 11:43). Or when He said to Jairus’ daughter, *“Little girl, I say to you, arise”* (Mar. 5:41). Whatever Jesus’ calls out on the last day—whether *“arise!”* or *“come out!”* or something else—our reading tells us clearly what will happen, *“the dead in Christ will rise.”*

Jesus’ word of command will awaken the dead. It will wake them up just as though they had been sleeping, just as you might wake up someone from a nap. That’s what His Word has the power to do. It gives life. His Word is how you and I were brought to faith in Him. It wasn’t by a decision we made. It wasn’t because we put ourselves in a good position to be influenced by God. It is because God in His mercy and grace looked with love upon us and called us to believe through the Gospel, through the good news of what Jesus did to save us.

When we hear this message, God the Holy Spirit is at work. He is working to plant faith in the hearts of unbelievers and to strengthen faith in the hearts of believers. This Gospel message comforts us when we mourn the death of our loved ones, and it prepares us for our own death. The promises of Jesus are why, though we are certainly saddened by death, we do *“not grieve as others do who have no hope.”*

Grieving without hope is celebrating a life without celebrating the life of Jesus and the life He won for us. Grieving without hope is looking for some sign of a loved one’s presence in nature or in the coincidences of daily life instead of rejoicing in their bliss in the presence of God. Grieving without hope is removing all trace of a loved one’s life because it hurts too much to think of them, or setting up shrines to them in our homes as though we can keep their spirit with us.

Grieving without hope is separating ourselves from the means God has given for our comfort and strength—His holy Word and Sacraments. There is no hope apart from God in the face of death. The crowd showed their hopelessness when Jesus told them the girl was *“not dead but sleeping.”* They laughed at Him. They did not trust His Word, so they received no comfort and encouragement.

But how can we be sure that what the Bible says about the last day will happen? How can we know that the dead will be raised, that we will see the people we love again, that we ourselves will wake up from the sleep of death? Besides the fact that there is no hopeful alternative to what God says, the Bible has never been proven false. Everything the Old Testament said about the coming Savior was clearly fulfilled in Jesus. Everything Jesus said would happen, including His suffering, death, and resurrection, did happen.

So why should we doubt what He tells us about His return in glory on the last day? Paul did not make up the words of today’s reading. *“For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord,”* he wrote. And, *“encourage one another with these words.”* The words we are privileged to hear today are words of life. They are words that cut through our pain, dispel our sadness, break up the

clouds of doubt we have. These words point us to what Jesus has done—died on the cross and rose again for our salvation—and to what He will do—descend from heaven in glory to bring all believers with Him to heaven.

So rest well, dear friends in Christ. At the end of your life, you can close your eyes without a care knowing that through Christ your sins are forgiven and eternal life is yours. By His grace, you will drift into the gentle slumber of death. Your soul will immediately fly to the Lord, and your body will lie in peaceful sleep until the day of our Lord's appearing.

Lord, let at last Thine angels come,
To Abram's bosom bear me home,
That I may die unfearing;
And in its narrow chamber keep
My body safe in peaceful sleep
Until Thy reappearing.
And then from death awaken me
That these mine eyes with joy may see,
O Son of God, Thy glorious face,
My Savior and my Fount of grace.
Lord Jesus Christ,
My prayer attend, my prayer attend,
And I will praise Thee without end. *Amen.* (ELH #406, v. 3)

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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