

Old Testament: Ezekiel 28: 1 - 2 & 6b - 10
New Testament: 2 Thessalonians 2: 1 - 4 & 13 - 17

Please pray with me. And now Lord God may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be pleasing and acceptable in Thy sight, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

The poor Thessalonians! Last week we came to understand that they were surely undergoing some very real forms of persecution, leading to feelings of affliction, by the Roman Empire. The letter writers felt the persecution and feelings of affliction bad enough to offer comfort and consolation in the form of an apocalyptic diatribe. The essential message: keep calm and carry on. Yes, your persecution and feelings of affliction are real, remain calm under fire and persevere. We came to understand that feelings of affliction remain relevant to believers today; it is just that the source of said affliction has changed from external persecution to multiple internal failure. Keep calm and carry on; we can do better church.

We clearly understand the Thessalonian church to be afflicted due to persecution. They are feeling pain, distress, grief, misery. In today's reading we have now come to understand that in the midst of all of this, someone or someones have used these feelings, these fears, to manipulate them into a deluded panic that the end times, the day of the Lord, has come upon them. In chapter 5:2 of their first letter, the writers had very explicitly written that the Thessalonians were already fully aware, presumably because it had been a part of their verbal teaching while they were present with the church, that "the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night". So then, which is it? Is the day of the Lord, Jesus' imminent return, forecasted to us by rampant persecution and affliction such that we can somehow see the proverbial writing on the wall? Or, will Jesus return when least expected, like a thief in the night, which echoes Jesus' own words when he tells the disciples "but concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only"? This very conundrum, and who might be identified as this "man of lawlessness" has vexed Christians for centuries. However, "the sheer number of these proposals (regarding who the anti-Christ might be and when the end times might begin) should caution against the assumption that the identity of this figure (or their timing) can be determined." In other words our time as Christians and believers is better spent elsewhere than in, ultimately, inconsequential alarmist speculation. Why do I say inconsequential? Whenever Jesus does return, love wins. Life wins. In and around reformation times, the early 1500's, there were some who accused the Pope of being the anti-Christ and in turn, those who accused Martin Luther of being the anti-Christ. 700 years later, we still have a Pope and we still have Lutherans. Such alarmist tendencies have not dissipated though; they persist. The Thessalonians are dealing

with this. Christians have dealt with this throughout the centuries. What then is the solution?

We actually see it suggested in verse 2. “We beg you not to be quickly shaken out of your wits or disturbed.” Do not be so shaken that you throw rational thinking straight out the window. Do not let your fear get the better of you. Slow down. Take a breath. Center yourself; root yourself in the foundation that is Christ crucified and resurrected thereby defeating death. And, for the love of God, think. In recent history, “congregations abound with the heirs to this alarmist tendency. If they do not announce that the “day of the Lord is already here,” they proclaim that the ordination of women will drive men from the seminaries, that any change in the liturgy signals the onset of chaos, that the church will die out in this generation.” And yet, here we are. Paul and his companions stress calmness and rational thought as defense mechanisms against becoming deluded by the fear mongering of alarmists. Contrary to popular belief, the world is not ending. The United States of America is not dying out because of who does, or does not, win the presidency. Are there things we can do to better steward God’s good creation? Absolutely. Are there things we can do to better care for our country and its inhabitants? Absolutely. But panicking and declaring that “the end is nigh!” is not going to help us do anything better whatsoever.

Now you might be asking yourself, “what does rational thinking have to do with faith? Either you have faith or you think. Are not the two mutually exclusive?” NO! Certainly not. All throughout our faith journeys we have been exposed to the person of Jesus, God made manifest. We have biblical witness and attestation AND the indwelling Holy Spirit to remind us of who Jesus is and what Jesus taught just in case we happen to “forget”. We know, rationally, who is of God because we have Jesus as our model; his life and actions. Therefore we know, rationally, who is not of God; their life and actions. Look at verses 3 & 4. This person of lawlessness is not of God because Jesus came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it. This person is the son of destruction because Jesus came to build and repair, to heal, and not to destroy. This figure will oppose and exalt himself against everything else that is godlike or authoritative because Jesus submitted himself to the ruling authorities, religious and civil, of the day in an effort to reform them. We know all of these things rationally *and* faithfully. Be not deluded friends. Somebody already fixed everything and he will come again.

So while we wait what are we to do? We stand firm in a sound mind of faith and hold to the majority understanding of the historic traditions. (Read F-1.01). [A sound mind of faith will carry us forward toward Jesus’ return.](#) Amen.