

Sermon for 22 Pentecost Yr A, 13/11/2011  
Based on 1 Thess 5:1-11  
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“On being prepared for the day of the Lord”

You likely know that one of the mottos of the Boy Scouts is, “Be prepared.” Any student knows that, in most cases, if they fail to study for an exam; then they cannot expect to do well on it. You also likely know that military personnel; whenever they are in a conflict situation; need to keep awake and alert. To fall asleep or to be negligent while on duty invites disaster, and possibly even death.

In today's second lesson, the Thessalonian church had asked Paul about the day of the Lord—which, for the early Christians had come to mean the second coming of Christ. They wanted to know when Christ would come again. Paul answers them with an exhortation. He teaches them what Jesus taught his disciples in the gospels—namely, that no one but God the Father knows exactly when the end times will come. Paul basically tells the Thessalonian church the same thing.

He speaks of the sudden, unpredictable, unexpected nature of the day of the Lord by stating that it “will come like a thief in the night.” The thief is more active at night because most folks are sleeping, unprepared and less alert. Moreover, the thief also has the darkness of the night in which to hide much easier than during the light of day.

Paul goes on to warn the Thessalonians not to misplace their trust in a false “peace and security.” Here one also thinks of the days of Jeremiah the prophet; who warned his people against the false prophets that said, “peace, peace,” when there was no peace. Paul goes on to say that for those who believe in a false “peace and security, then sudden destruction will come upon them.

I think a living parable of that is what happened earlier this year when the tsunami and earthquake hit Japan. According to the media reports—even though Japan had the reputation of being the most earthquake prepared nation in the world—the sudden destructive forces of the 9.0 earthquake and tsunami caught the Japanese people off-guard. Many Japanese citizens had built their houses at a distance that they thought would protect them from the wind and waves of a tsunami. Alas, they were wrong! Pictures of how the destructive forces of the tsunami tore houses apart into hundreds or thousands of pieces still remain in my mind. The disaster wiped out entire towns and around 21,000 people are dead or missing. Moreover, the Japanese also thought that their nuclear power plant was built to weather almost any storm. They thought it was safe and secure. Wrong! Tragically, we now know that was a false assumption. Furthermore, the radioactivity from the malfunctioning nuclear power plant certainly has had, and likely shall continue to have some rather devastating health and environmental consequences. You may have seen or heard the recent news that now some experts estimate that it is going to take 30 years to fix Japan’s nuclear reactors by removing the fuel rods. When such devastating natural and human disasters occur, echoing the words of Paul, “there will be no escape!”

Paul then goes on to compliment the Thessalonians, saying that they “are all children of the light and children of the day.” Then he exhorts them not to fall asleep or to get drunk. The meaning of the word asleep and sleep is rather interesting, according to Pastor Robert McCreight.

Sleep is the recurring state of losing awareness of our surroundings, and of course being helpless to interact meaningfully. The natural condition of sleep is not so bad, because it always terminates after a relatively short period of time. In fact, the body demands sleep and

uses that time of mental and physical relaxation to energize the person for another period of awareness.

The sleep which Paul warns against is close to a different condition called trypanosomiasis—sleeping sickness. This is the result of infection by a single-celled organism which causes fever, headache and chills in the unfortunate person. Swelling and skin rashes develop, and the person grows weaker until (s)he eventually lapses into a coma and dies. Treatment—if it is to be effective—must begin before irreparable damage to the nervous system occurs.

Whether Paul knew anything about sleeping sickness we will never know. But we can be sure that he was very much awake to the urgency of an intentional and meaningful faith response by his readers, and the critical, life-threatening danger that would come to those who failed to take steps to be saved.

Like a responsible physician he has warned us about the dangers of the condition. Let us now do our part to seek immunity and live.<sup>1</sup>

After Paul speaks of the dangers of darkness, sleep, and drunkenness—he continues with his exhortation. In our struggles against false peace and security; in our resistance to falling into sleep, darkness and night; Paul now speaks in military language, exhorting the Thessalonians and us to: “put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.”

Paul, you remember, is fond of military language to exhort Christians in their faith. For example, in Romans 13:12, we read: “The night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light.” In 2 Corinthians, Paul, speaking of his and his co-workers’ ministry, says that they employed: “truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left.” In 2 Cor 10:3-4, Paul again employs military language, saying: “Indeed, we live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human

standards; for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds." Again, in Ephesians 6:13-17, you likely remember Paul's military language, where he provides a picture of the Christian taking up "the whole armour of God."

As we can see then from Paul's military language, there is the confidence that the Christian's armour of God shall protect them from evil and harm.

National Geographic carried an interesting article recently which it titled "How to Dress for War" (April 2005). It was about those people in our society who dress up in costume in order to re-enact battles from the Civil War. Perhaps you've witnessed one of these re-enactments. Civil War re-enactors are a fascinating breed of history buffs, according to this article. These men research the Civil War meticulously, especially the manner in which the war was fought. Then they spend their spare time setting up the most realistic re-enactments of the historical battles of the War possible. According to re-enactor Michael Melford, these men "prepare for battle 365 days a year." Re-enactors live, eat, and breathe like actual Civil War soldiers. They wear soldiers' garb that is sewn out of the same type of material that would have been in use for the Civil War. They use ancient muskets. During the re-enactments, they live like the soldiers would have lived, sleeping on the ground, never bathing, eating very little food. They are willing to endure hardship and discomfort in order to re-enact a war that has long since been settled.

St. Paul compares the Christian life to a soldier preparing for war. He writes, "But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet." What he is saying to us is that it matters when you begin your day how you think of yourself. Are you simply a sales person, teacher, manager, technician, engineer or whatever, getting ready to

go into work? Or are you a follower of Jesus Christ who happens to be a sales person, teacher, manager, technician, engineer or whatever getting ready for a day of spreading the faith, hope and love of Jesus to the people you come into contact in your work? It makes a difference. Are you an emissary of Christ or are you simply a nice person?<sup>2</sup>

Whatever you may be fighting against in your life; whether it be the temptations of the mind, the heart and soul, or the body; whether it be temptations you face at home, in school, on the job, or even within the church; may you wake up each day with the confidence of the apostle Paul by putting on the armour of God; the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. May you depend on the protection of this armour of God; wearing it with pride; and making a difference in your personal life, the church, and the world. In this way you need not worry about the coming day of the Lord—for you shall be prepared every day. Amen.

1 *Emphasis: A Preaching Journal for the Parish Pastor*, Vol. 23, No. 4, November-December 1993 (Lima, OH: CSS Publishing Co., Inc.), p. 23.

2 King Duncan, "Day People," at: <[www.esermons.com](http://www.esermons.com)>.