

## “The Living God”

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November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010

II Thess. 2:1-5, 13-17

Luke 20:27-38

[The Apostle Paul wrote,]

‘As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ  
and our being gathered together to him,  
we beg you, brothers and sisters,  
not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed,  
either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us,  
to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here.’ II Th. 2:1-2

Let us pray... O God,

May we be patient as we wait

for your appearance in our lives to set things right.

May we be patient with ourselves

for not recognizing your presence – until at last we do. Amen

Well, the votes are in

and the people have spoken.

There are 100 new representatives *for the people* in Congress

and they have promised to get to work

helping America get back to work.

Part of that promise is to undo legislation that is feared

will cripple future generations with debt.

In the meantime, we are still at war in the Middle East

against a determined enemy hiding in the shadows.

There has been some progress in rebuilding the economy,

but many are unemployed and winter is coming...

The congregation of Thessalonica was troubled with reports

that the day of judgment was at hand and that the Lord

had already returned and was gone.

The people were terrified by this –

and at the prospect that they were *left behind*.

But the Apostle Paul reassured them that they would have no doubts

about ‘the day of the Lord’ when Jesus would return

and the world would be judged –

for this would be preceded with a rebellion

led by a lawless, arrogant leader.

Willard, p.2

Instead, the Thessalonians were to keep believing God loved them  
as the 'first fruits of salvation' – as part of the church's beginning  
and they must keep their focus  
by working for 'the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ'  
which is love made real as a beloved community.

Keep working. Don't give up.

Listen for the truth and don't be bamboozled.

Healthy Christian congregations have always been  
an island in the storm of what's going on in the world.  
For example, we as The United Church of Christ at The Villages  
are one of a few congregations anywhere these days  
who have built their first church building.

That is a big accomplishment,

but staying open these days is another big challenge.

The Crystal Cathedral is having trouble,

and if they are, then potentially all churches are at risk.

But there is more at stake than real estate or even Sunday worship –  
we must recognize that it is not all up to us.

We must remember we believe in a living God

who has given us life and offers us eternal life.

We must believe God will prosper our purpose to bring

the Good News that God's Kingdom is available to all

no matter who you are or where you are on your journey.

But what will save us and other congregations

is to remain faithful and trust the blessing –

we must put our *faith forward*

that we will find our way as churches have always done.

Keep working. Don't give up.

Listen for the truth and don't be bamboozled.

The building block of the church

is the individual relationship between you & God.

Through worship, Bible study, fellowship, & the active caring concern  
for one another, for our church's resources, and for society,

we as individuals allow ourselves to grow

as compassionate, fulfilled human beings.

Willard, p.3

When things fall apart in our lives,  
that's when faith begins and we see for ourselves  
that God is a living being who seeks a dialogue with us.  
And Jesus spoke of how this was a '...fact that the dead are raised'  
and that God is not a God 'of the dead, but of the living;  
for to [God] all of [us] are alive.' Luke 20:37-38  
So, Jesus is also saying that God is a living being, too,  
whom we must take seriously and make room for in our lives.

And when we see life as connected with God as a living being  
who is calling us into a life of purpose,  
then even set-backs in terms of our health, finances,  
and broken dreams only serve to teach us and prepare us  
and create within us a place to meet God.

I have come to believe that as eyesight and hearing fail us and  
as we lose the ability to come and go as we choose,  
we are forced to come to terms with *who we are* inside  
and that if we have prepared ourselves properly  
by what we have learned despite suffering in life,  
God will meet us in that place within that we call *the heart*.

We start out innocent and we are influenced by relationships  
good and bad, which in turn teach us  
about our relationship with God.  
And God already knows the number of hairs on our heads,  
God already knows our individual DNA code  
by which we are composed.  
God already knows who you are by name and loves you.

Still our relationship to God is our choice –  
that is whether or not we want to be part of the dialogue.  
We can just as easily choose to go our own way,  
and be responsible for the consequences of that choice.  
Or we can recognize that God is with us,  
as a living, active, creative being that is still at work  
surprising us with joy if we allow ourselves to be surprised.

Willard, p.4

The Apostle Paul reassured the Thessalonians  
that the end had not yet come and they must keep working  
for the glory of Christ which is a beloved community;  
And that it was not all up to them to make it happen,  
but that God is alive and still at work, and still speaking.

There are catastrophes and things can fall apart,  
but with God who is alive there is more to this life than we know.

So, keep working. Don't give up.

Listen for the truth and don't be bamboozled.

In Orthodox churches,

you can find an icon or image of Christ in the ceiling  
of the sanctuary, looking down with the Gospel in one hand  
while blessing with the other.

When I was at summer camp as a teenager,

I remember thinking of Christ looking down  
through the ceiling of our gathering place  
and just being aware of Christ alive now –  
before I had ever heard of icons or Orthodox churches.

You don't have to imagine Christ looking down passed  
the chandeliers in our sanctuary,

but I invite you to open the skylight of your mind  
and allow God to be present be with you  
and let the love of God shine into your heart.

Amen

II Thess. 2:1-5, 13-17

1As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ  
and our being gathered together to him,  
we beg you, brothers and sisters,  
2not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed,  
either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us,  
to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here.

3Let no one deceive you in any way;  
for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first  
and the lawless one is revealed,  
the one destined for destruction.

4He opposes and exalts himself  
above every so-called god or object of worship,  
so that he takes his seat in the temple of God,  
declaring himself to be God.

5Do you not remember that I told you these things  
when I was still with you?

13 But we must always give thanks to God for you,  
brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord,  
because God chose you as the first fruits for salvation  
through sanctification by the Spirit  
and through belief in the truth.

14For this purpose he called you  
through our proclamation of the good news,  
so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

15So then, brothers and sisters,  
stand firm and hold fast to the traditions  
that you were taught by us,  
either by word of mouth or by our letter.

16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father,  
who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort  
and good hope,

17comfort your hearts and strengthen them  
in every good work and word.

Luke 20:27-38

27 Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection,  
came to him 28 and asked him a question,

‘Teacher,

Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies,

leaving a wife but no children,

the man shall marry the widow

and raise up children for his brother.

29 Now there were seven brothers;

the first married,

and died childless;

30 then the second 31 and the third married her,

and so in the same way all seven died childless.

32 Finally the woman also died.

33 In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be?

For the seven had married her.’

34 Jesus said to them,

‘Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage;

35 but those who are considered worthy of a place

in that age and in the resurrection from the dead

neither marry nor are given in marriage.

36 Indeed they cannot die any more, because they are like angels  
and are children of God, being children of the resurrection.

37 And the fact that the dead are raised

Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush,

where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham,

the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

38 Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living;

for to him all of them are alive.’