25th S. a. Pentecost **November 15, 2026**
Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 **It Matters What We Believe**
Trinity Lutheran Church **Rev. Tom Boeck**

In the name of Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and who calls us to remain faithful until He comes again. Amen.

Have you ever heard someone say, "Well, I think we're all going to the same place anyway. There are just different ways of getting there"? It's a popular idea. And on the surface, it sounds rather generous, doesn't it? After all, we want to respect other people. We don't want to appear judgmental or suggest that we're somehow better than someone who believes differently.

But there's a serious problem with that thinking. It's simply not what God tells us in His Word. Because if it doesn't matter what we believe, why does God give us His Word? Why did Jesus suffer and die on the cross? And why would the Scriptures repeatedly warn us to remain faithful?

Our readings this morning remind us that spiritual complacency is one of the greatest dangers facing Christians. The prophet Zephaniah delivers a sobering warning to God's people. The Lord declares that He will punish those who have become complacent, those who say in their hearts, **"The LORD will not do good, nor will he do ill" (Zephaniah 1:12).**

These people weren't necessarily denying God's existence. They simply believed that God wasn't particularly concerned about how they lived. They assumed everything would continue as it always had. They no longer took God's Word seriously. And God warned them how terribly mistaken they were.

Before we become too critical, consider how easily the same thing can happen to us. We live in a world that encourages us to compromise what we believe. We're told that truth is relative, that everyone should decide for themselves what is right, and that religious convictions shouldn't interfere with our desire to get along.

Little by little, those attitudes can influence our thinking. We begin to wonder whether certain teachings of Scripture are really all that important. Perhaps we become less concerned about what our children and grandchildren believe. We may even convince ourselves that as long as someone is a reasonably good person, surely God will welcome them into heaven. But Jesus never taught that.

In **John 14:6**, Jesus declares, **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."** Jesus doesn't say He's one way among many. He tells us plainly that salvation comes through Him. That's not religious arrogance. That's the truth revealed by the Son of God Himself.

The devil would be perfectly happy for us to believe in God, attend church occasionally, and consider ourselves religious people, provided we eventually

become indifferent to God's Word. Satan doesn't always try to persuade people to reject Christianity outright. Sometimes his temptation is simply to convince us that our faith doesn't require much attention. That we can neglect God's Word. That doctrine isn't important. That one belief is just as good as another. But false teaching is **never** harmless when it draws us away from Christ.

The apostle Paul warned Timothy about this danger. In **2 Timothy 4:3–4**, he writes, **"For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths."** Doesn't that sound familiar? People seeking religious messages that affirm what they already believe rather than allowing God's Word to correct them.

And that brings us to our Epistle. Paul reminds the Thessalonians that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. People will believe everything is peaceful and secure, only to discover that judgment has arrived. But Paul doesn't leave Christians trembling in uncertainty. Instead, he reminds us who we are.

"For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness" (1 Thessalonians 5:5). We belong to Christ. Through our Baptism, God has claimed us as His own. Through His Word, the Holy Spirit continues to strengthen and preserve our faith.

And because we belong to Christ, Paul encourages us to remain spiritually alert. We don't treat our faith as something we acquired years ago and can now safely put on a shelf.

Our faith needs nourishment. We need God's Word, prayer, worship, and the Lord's Supper. Not because these earn our salvation, but because through His Word and Sacraments, God strengthens and preserves us in the faith.

And we're responsible for passing that faith along to future generations. Our children and grandchildren are growing up surrounded by competing voices, many openly contradicting Scripture.

If we don't help them understand what God has revealed, someone else will gladly teach them what the world wants them to believe. We're called to share the faith, teach it, and demonstrate its importance through the way we live.

In our Gospel, Jesus tells the parable of the talents. A master entrusts his servants with valuable resources. Two servants use what they've received faithfully. But the

third buries what his master entrusted to him. When the master returns, that servant discovers that doing nothing was not faithfulness.

Jesus isn't teaching that we earn heaven through good works. He's warning against complacency that fails to recognize the significance of what we've received. And we've received something infinitely more valuable than silver or gold. We've received the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That's not something to bury, neglect, or compromise.

But here's the most important truth of all. Our salvation doesn't depend upon our ability to remain perfectly vigilant. If it did, none of us would have any hope. We all become distracted. We all struggle with temptation. We all have moments when our faith isn't as strong as it ought to be. And that's precisely why we need Jesus.

Paul gives us this wonderful assurance: **"For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him"** (1 Thessalonians 5:9–10). There's the Gospel! Christ has accomplished what we could never accomplish. He has borne our sins, endured the judgment we deserved, and risen victorious over death.

Our confidence rests not in the strength of our faith, but in the faithfulness of our Savior. And because He loves us, He continues calling us back to His Word, strengthening us through His Sacraments, and keeping us in His care.

So as we await His return, we need not live in fear. But neither should we become complacent. We know whom we believe. We know His promises. And we know His Word is true. The world may tell us that every path leads to heaven. But Jesus has already shown us the way. And that way leads through His cross and empty tomb.

So remain in His Word. Receive His gifts. Share His truth with those you love. And encourage one another to remain faithful. Because the day is surely drawing near.

And when our Savior returns, may He find us trusting in Him, rejoicing in His promises, and eagerly awaiting the day when He welcomes us into the joy of our Master.

Amen.