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Holy Faith, Santa Fe
8 November 2026

Proper 27 – Year A
Amos 5.18-24
Psalm 70
1 Thess. 4.13-18
Matthew 25.1-13

In the name of the one, true, and living God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

On the face of it, it may seem odd that this Sunday's readings focus our attention on death. We're still, after all, in the season after Pentecost, the season of the church that celebrates life and growth. The description of Jesus' second coming in Thessalonians and the adage of "be prepared" in Matthew's Gospel sound more like Advent themes for next month. But this month, when we see the daylight hours growing shorter, the darkness coming earlier, and feel the weather turning colder, is an apt time to think about our own mortality. With each passing day, the day of our death approaches. Regardless of whether we are prepared for it, death – like winter – nears.

The inevitability of death, particularly our own, is something most of us go to great lengths to ignore or deny. We are steeped in a culture that chooses to ignore or deny death. The funeral industry goes to great lengths euphemistically to deny that a death has ever taken place. We pay morticians to make up and dress up corpses to look as if they're merely sleeping. Newspaper obituaries almost uniformly avoid the word "died" as though their subjects did something else altogether. Death is a fearsome concept for many of us. We don't like it, and we certainly don't want it to happen. Yet it's only through facing our fear head-on that we have any chance of overcoming it.

On the subject of death, Christians have an opportunity – no, really a duty – to be counter-cultural. For Christians, death is not the end of life, but merely part of life – or as the Book of Common Prayer puts it, "[i]n the midst of life we are in death," (BCP, p.

492) and with death “life is changed, not ended.” BCP, p.349) The Christian is united with Christ in his death and resurrection. Part of our Christian hope is that God will raise us from death, as God did with Jesus, that we may live with Christ in the communion of saints, for Jesus is the resurrection and the life. (John 11.25) As St. Paul tells us, we no longer have reason to grieve for ourselves, “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 died…and so we will be with the Lord forever.” (1 Thess. 4.13-14, 17b) Our assurance as Christians is that nothing, not even death, shall separate us from the love of God which is Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8.38-39)

This month is an apt time to be reminded of our hope and assurance as Christians, and our response to them. Our Sunday Gospel readings in November and our November Daily Office readings from the Revelation to St. John the Divine all deal with the end time and final judgment. The month began last week with that great Feast of All Saints and the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed, or All Souls’ Day, when we remembered all those who have gone before us in the Faith, great and small, known and unknown, celebrated on the Church’s calendar and honored in our hearts. November will end with the First Sunday of Advent when we prepare ourselves for the Second Coming of our Lord as we prepare to receive anew the Christ Child in our hearts.

What does Jesus’ Second Coming look like? There’s a lot of curiosity and speculation about what the end time will look like. Some say we are in the end-time now. They often base their predictions on the creative interpretation of the imaginative

and highly allegorical book of Revelation. A clearer picture of what will transpire is given by St. Paul in today's reading from his letter to the Thessalonians: Jesus, "with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air."

Far from providing a blueprint of what will happen when Christ comes again, St. Paul is addressing the practical concerns of the Thessalonians about what will happen to their dead relatives at Jesus' expected and imminent return. This description of what has since been termed the "Rapture" (from the Latin word for "caught up," as in "we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds") has given rise to many creative and imaginative stories of what will happen in the end time, including the popular but fantastic "Left Behind" series. The reality is that we don't know what the end time will look like. More importantly, we don't know when it will happen.

That brings us to the message of today's Gospel reading from Matthew: "Be Prepared." Regarding the end time, regarding our own dying, Jesus tells us that we "know neither the day nor the hour." So be prepared. What does that look like, being prepared? For us, it probably means more than having enough lamp oil as a bridesmaid when the groom comes for them and the bride so they can find their way in the dark to the wedding feast – the parable Jesus used about a practice of his time to symbolize being prepared for the end-time. But it's been a timeless concern, sufficient for inclusion as a petition in the ancient prayer of the early Church called the Great Litany, which we still use to mark the beginning of Lent: "Deliver us, Lord, from dying unexpectedly and unprepared." In modern day parlance, we associate "Be Prepared"

with the motto of the Scouts. But in talking about our death and the end-time, we certainly need more than some extra water and a compass! How do we prepare?

We, as Christians, can prepare to die by being prepared to live. We can live every day as if it were our last. We can start by mending right relationships with our family. We can mend right relationships with our friends. We can mend our right relationship with God. Accepting our life as transitory gives a definite urgency to our living. What we do with our limited time on this earth suddenly matters. Accepting that our death might well be imminent gives special meaning to what we choose to do here and now. It inspires us to live each day as though it were our last. And someday, of course, it will be our last.

In the growing darkness of this season and in the darkness of this world, we, as Christians, can prepare to be the light of the world. Jesus tells us, “You are the light of the world.” That was the theme of last year’s stewardship campaign that we have successfully concluded by processing at this service the “Light of the World” banner bearing ribbons of parishioners’ prayer intentions. This past year, you have shown a spirit of gratitude, a spirit of generosity, a spirit of gladness. You have been grateful for your faith community. You have been generous to your church home. You have been glad to be at Holy Faith. You have radiated your love of God in Christ, your love of Holy Faith, and your love of one another.

Today, we launch our stewardship campaign for the coming year, the theme of which is “You continue to be the light of the world.” Stewardship packets are available for you to pick up after this service. But this year, let’s not wait a year before we can celebrate the successful conclusion of the campaign. Go home, review the stewardship

materials, and make your pledge of support by two weeks from today, November 22, for the mission and ministry of Holy Faith in the coming year. You know the importance of making a pledge, so don't wait and just do it. You know what you're able to do. You know you're grateful for your faith community. You know you're generous to your church home. You know you're glad to be at Holy Faith.

You can continue to be the light of the world! You radiate your love of God in Christ. You radiate your love of Holy Faith. You radiate your love of one another. By your radiance, Holy Faith also can be the Light of the World. You are the Light of the World so Holy Faith can be the Light of the World. Holy Faith has been a beacon of Christ's light for 163 years. Let your light shine before others – through your acts of faithfulness, kindness, and charity – so they may see your good deeds – through Holy Faith's Mission & Outreach efforts and Pastoral Care ministry – and glorify your Father in heaven – through Holy Faith's Liturgy & Music, Community, and Hospitality. In the words of one of the prayer ribbons on the Prayer Banner: "Be the Light you hope to see in the World."

So, in this end-time when we contemplate the darkness and shortness of our days as well as the days of the season, may we remember, "While we have time, let us do good…especially unto them that are of the household of faith." (Galatians 6.10) We so remember, not out of fear, but out of faithfulness and thanksgiving to God! Amen.