

**Sermon – 11-12-2017**  
**Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost**  
**1 Thessalonians 4**  
**By**  
**Pastor Christopher Miller**

**We are reaching the end of the Pentecost season, and that usually means that things in our Scriptures start getting a little apocalyptic. By apocalyptic, I mean lots of end of the world sort of stuff. There's usually some scary stuff, and some hopeful stuff. But most of the apocalyptic that we see in our world today usually focuses on the scary stuff. Apocalypticism flies around us so easily nowadays. One thing that we as humans have discovered is that hyperbole brings attention and ratings. So, everything bad that happens becomes the end of the world, or will lead to the end of the world. Our trouble is that our definitions of "bad" vary. Certain groups are apocalyptic based on current conditions in the world, others think things are just fine, and still others think everything is always bad. But when Christians think of the apocalypse, they usually think in terms of Christ's return. And one of the Scriptures that usually shows up in this case is the first reading we're going to look at today.**

*Thessalonians 4:13-18*

**In this passage, Paul is trying to give the Thessalonians some peace, because they were worried about what was going to happen to those who had passed away before Jesus returned. Talking about the end can bring peace.**

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**Verse 17 is the one that gets trotted out in conversations about the apocalypse. \*\*\*\*"We will meet the Lord in the air." I know that you've heard the theology before, because we carry an entire book series based on an interpretation of this verse. Most of the apocalyptic conversations that you hear in popular cultural Christianity surround an idea called the Rapture. The idea is that those who believe in Christ will be spared from having to go through all the terrible parts of apocalypse, and they will just disappear. It's an attractive idea; we all want to avoid pain and suffering, and it's been a somewhat effective evangelism tool in certain circles. The trouble is, it is completely and utterly wrong.**

**I've got three reasons why it's a bad interpretation of this verse, and we're going to go Scripture-theology-Scripture. First, look at verse 16. Jesus comes with a shout, the trumpet sounds, and look what happens: the dead in Christ rise. This is the resurrection of the body that we confess every week. If the resurrection has come, and we cannot die again, why would we need to**

**be taken away from pain and suffering? And besides, and here's the theological reason, God did not come to deliver us from pain and suffering. He came to deliver us *through* pain and suffering, with his mercy. Where was his mercy most shown? The cross. He doesn't cause us to avoid pain, he uses it to bring us his grace, and most importantly, himself. And that brings us to the second Scripture reason, right in verse 17. It is buried right in the phrase "meet the Lord in the air", the phrase that sold millions of terribly written Left Behind books. It's that meeting that's pesky. The Left Behind interpretation is that you meet Jesus in the air, and stay there. The word for "meet" is only used three times in the rest of the New Testament, and twice in our Gospel reading today.**

***Matthew 25:1-13***

**As we read this parable of Jesus, notice the use of the word "meet", but also notice the position of the bridegroom, who is obviously Jesus.**

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**Do you notice something? Where does the bridegroom end up at the end of the parable? In the town that the women came from! This "meet" isn't just a hangout somewhere. It is a welcome of someone coming back to a place that they are loved, and they stay there. This is the real good part of apocalypse. It's not that we get delivered from this terrible place, it's that this terrible place has been redeemed by the work of Jesus Christ,**

**and he's coming back to dwell here with his resurrected people forever. Yes, we need to keep watch, just as Jesus' parable tells us. Yes, he can come at any time. Yes, he is coming, but what is he coming for? He's coming for the same thing that has been declared to us for thousands of years.**

***Daniel 7:13-14***

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**He is coming to rule his kingdom. He is coming to with his authority, glory and sovereign power. And what is he going to do with that? Same thing he does in this place, right here, right now: forgive your sins, raise you from the dead, and bring you life eternal. So for us who believe in Christ, the apocalypse has already come. The same Jesus Christ who saves us is the one who will descend from the clouds, who we will meet in the air, who we will welcome home, and who we will live with forever. He has already taken the suffering on his shoulders. And he comes now to bestow his gifts on his bride, and we will be with him here, forever.  
**AMEN.****