

Sleep and drunkenness are attributes of children of darkness, those who ignore or oppose God's ways. We are, (here he uses a military image) to possess the Christian virtues of "faith" (v. 8), "love" and "hope" – the certain hope of "salvation"; these virtues protect us from evil. For God has pre-ordained ("destined us", v. 9) that we are saved through Christ rather than being damned eternally ("wrath"). Jesus rescues us from sin, so that, whether we are alive ("awake", v. 10) or physically dead ("asleep") when he comes again, we will live with him in heaven. Finally, he advises his readers to "build up" (v. 11) each other, to support each other spiritually: here he sees the church as the temple of God under construction; the builder is God, and Christians can participate in the work.

Matthew 25:14-30

Jesus continues to tell parables about the kingdom of heaven. In the previous parables, he has told us that we need to be prepared for the Second Coming at all times. Today's parable is set in the realm of finance. A master, before leaving on a journey, entrusts his slaves with his money, "each according to his ability" (v. 15). (A talent was about 15 years' wages for a labourer, a large sum of money.) Two servants invest the money and earn more (vv. 16, 17); the third simply buries it (v. 18). When the master returns (v. 19), he praises the investors; they, he says, will be made responsible for "many things" (vv. 21, 23), and will "enter into the joy of your master". But the third slave, admitting that he was afraid of his master's wrath (v. 24), simply returns the original sum (v. 25). The master chastises him for his wickedness and laziness. This slave loses what he has been given (v. 28) and is condemned to "outer darkness" (v. 30). This would have caused a stir in Jesus' day, for a rabbinic maxim commends burial of money as a way of protecting it. But this parable is about the kingdom of heaven, so what is the lesson it teaches? "Weeping and gnashing of teeth" (v. 30) is a stock phrase for condemnation of the wicked at the Last Day. The master stands for God and the servants for various kinds of people. Yes, God both rewards generously and is a stern judge. He expects us to be good stewards of his gifts. We will be commended and rewarded for faithfully carrying out his mission. Failure to use what he gives us will result in punishment – by separation from him, the essence of goodness. We are expected to make his gifts grow. He is free to distribute them as he sees fit (vv. 28-29).

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~ Notices ~

Prayers - Prayers are said daily for the welfare of our community, our nation and the world. If you have any particular issue that you would like to be prayed for, do please email me on frkevinobrien@me.com or call me on 065 672 4721.

YouTube - our YouTube channel now has over 105 videos, comprising services, talks and sermons. Please do visit the channel by searching for **St Columba's Church Ennis** and do *subscribe* if you can, we are aiming to reach 100 subscribers before Christmas. Also visit our **Facebook** page: **Drumcliffe Church of Ireland Ennis**

Rector: Email: frkevinobrien@me.com Tel: 065 672 4721

And for a bit of fun:

Amazing Grace as you have never heard!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIS0shC8u5I>

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2nd Sunday before Advent (Year A)

Collect

Heavenly Lord, you long for the world's salvation: stir us from apathy, restrain us from excess and revive in us new hope that all creation will one day be healed in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Suggested Hymns - *For the online service you might like to view these hymns with lyrics on YouTube.*

- 1) Immortal, invisible, God only wise
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spE-BE23qxA&t=53s>
- 2) Hark! a thrilling voice is sounding
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKC1zCaAE_o
- 3) Angel voices, ever singing
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nig-VqlyGzA>
- 4) Take my life, and let it be
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Of4I5bTdZ8M>

Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18

Be silent before the Lord God!

For the day of the Lord is at hand;
the Lord has prepared a sacrifice,
he has consecrated his guests.
At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps,
and I will punish the people
who rest complacently* on their dregs,
those who say in their hearts,
'The Lord will not do good,
nor will he do harm.'
Their wealth shall be plundered,
and their houses laid waste.
Though they build houses,
they shall not inhabit them;
though they plant vineyards,
they shall not drink wine from them.
The great day of the Lord is near,
near and hastening fast;
the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter,
the warrior cries aloud there.
That day will be a day of wrath,
a day of distress and anguish,
a day of ruin and devastation,
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and thick darkness,
a day of trumpet blast and battle cry
against the fortified cities
and against the lofty battlements.
I will bring such distress upon people
that they shall walk like the blind;
because they have sinned against the Lord,
their blood shall be poured out like dust,
and their flesh like dung.
Neither their silver nor their gold
will be able to save them
on the day of the Lord's wrath;
in the fire of his passion
the whole earth shall be consumed;
for a full, a terrible end
he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.

Psalm 90

Lord, you have been our refuge ♦
from one generation to another.
Before the mountains were brought forth,
or the earth and the world were formed, ♦

from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
 You turn us back to dust and say: ♦
 'Turn back, O children of earth.'
 For a thousand years in your sight are
 but as yesterday, ♦
 which passes like a watch in the night.
 You sweep them away like a dream; ♦
 they fade away suddenly like the grass.
 In the morning it is green and flourishes; ♦
 in the evening it is dried up and withered.
 For we consume away in your displeasure; ♦
 we are afraid at your wrathful indignation.
 You have set our misdeeds before you ♦
 and our secret sins in the light of your countenance.
 When you are angry, all our days are gone; ♦
 our years come to an end like a sigh.
 The days of our life are three score years and ten,
 or if our strength endures, even four score; ♦
 yet the sum of them is but labour and sorrow,
 for they soon pass away and we are gone.
 Who regards the power of your wrath ♦
 and your indignation like those who fear you?
 So teach us to number our days ♦
 that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.

1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters,* you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When they say, 'There is peace and security', then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! But you, beloved,* are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then, let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Matthew 25: 14-30

'For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents,* to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, "Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents." His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, "Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents." His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few

things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours." But his master replied, "You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Commentary

Zephaniah

In 1:1, Zephaniah tells us that he is descended from Hezekiah, most likely the king who ruled Judah 715-687 BCE. This prophet's intimate knowledge of Jerusalem and affairs in the court, and the absence of a theme found in other prophetic books - denunciation of the king - suggest that he was of royal descent. 1:1 also tells us that his ministry began in the reign of King Josiah, the great reformer. But his denunciation of corruption in religious affairs suggests that his prophecies date from before the reforms of 621 BCE. The book predicts doom for Judah for failing to follow God's ways, and adverse judgement on other nations, too; however, the final chapter promises comfort and consolation for those inhabitants of Jerusalem who wait patiently for the Lord and serve God as a community. They will rejoice when God comes into their midst.

Psalms 90:1-6, 13-17

Vv. 1-6 contrast God's eternity with the short and troubled span of human life. God pre-existed creation (v. 2a) and he continues to live for ever ("from everlasting to everlasting you are God"). In the Garden of Eden creation story, "the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground" (Genesis 2:7); here (v. 3), the writer laments that in death this process is reversed. A human lifetime is infinitesimally short compared to God's (v. 4). The Hebrew of v. 5 is unclear; it too speaks of the brevity of life, as does v. 6. To the psalmist, human life simply ends. Vv. 13-17 are more hopeful; they seek God's intervention. "Have compassion", Lord; after the night of suffering, be merciful to us "in the morning" (v. 14), so we may rejoice. V. 15 probably speaks of the value of discipline. In v. 16, the writer recognizes that God is active in creation: he intervenes on behalf of people: "your work" may well be "your glorious power". May God give us grace so that our efforts may be productive.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Paul has just told the Thessalonian Christians that, at the end of the age, both the faithful who have already died and those still alive will ascend to heaven to be with God for ever. Now, he says, concerning when Christ will come again, you are well aware that he will come suddenly and unexpectedly ("like a thief in the night", v. 2). Others who are lulled by the "peace and security" (v. 3) will be separated from God for ever ("sudden destruction"), as suddenly as a "woman" comes into labour; God's condemnation of them will be inescapable. Then, in vv. 4-8a, he exhorts his readers to moral vigilance. Being "children of light", (i.e. united with Christ, the light of the world), they will not be surprised by Christ's second coming. So let us not become careless and sinful ("fall asleep", v. 6) as others do, but let us be prepared. Let us have the sobriety of people who have peace of mind through trust in God.