

I Thessalonians 5:16-24

Dear Friends in Christ,

George Bernard Shaw was a noted Irish playwright, critic and polemicist (one who opposes another in argument, especially on the subject of theology). He died in 1950. He wrote the following:

I am sorry to have to introduce the subject of Christmas in these articles. It is an indecent subject; a cruel, gluttonous subject...a wicked cadging, lying, filthy, blasphemous, and demoralizing subject. Christmas is forced on a reluctant and disgusted nation by the shopkeepers and the press; in its own merits it would wither and shrivel in the fiery breath of universal hatred; and anyone who looked back to it would be turned to a pillar of greasy sausages. (Dramatic Opinions, vol. 2)

Shaw would delight in the present day movement to remove the word *Christmas* and references to the Bible, the Ten Commandments and Jesus from the public square. However, in his twisted human wisdom, he could not see that removal of these issues would not change the fact that even without Christmas we live in an increasingly intensified - to use his terms - "wicked, cadging, lying, filthy, blasphemous" world - 365 days a year!

Our Advent Journey moves us beyond the moment to . . .

GUIDANCE FOR THE HOLI-DAZE

I. The Daze.

The word "holiday" means "Holy day" - referring to religious celebrations. The world uses the word to mean "a day of festivity or recreation when no work is done." If you looked at the theme, I emphasized for us a change for the closing days of December into the New Year: Holi-daze - with emphasis on the d.a.z.e. - "daze." It has been used before, and I do find it appropriate. And here's a definition of that word, though I know you know it, but I like the following: Daze - "to become exhausted...to stupify especially by a blow."

For all the changes, the world remains the same. Some might argue. But it remains the same: sin, struggle, dying, death - the result of being stupefied by the blow of sin. In most ways, worsening. The Apostle Peter was clear:

...I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." (I Pet. 3:1b-4)

Peter said this: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief..." (I Peter 23:10) Paul said it: "...the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'There is peace and security' (You know, everything is going to be okay.), then sudden destruction will come upon them..." (I Thess. 5:3) Above all, Jesus said it: "Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." (Matt. 24:44)

The world is exhausted from running to and fro. And its scoffing cry? "What's to fear? Where is the promise of his coming?" The answer? It's closer than we can imagine! And what about God's people living in this world? The Scriptures say,

“Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers...fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!...Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. For the evildoers shall be cut off... but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he sees that his day is coming.” (Ps. 37:1,7b,8,13) (Did we hear that? “Fret not...”.)

II. The Do's.

The guidance from our text this morning gives us some “do’s and “do not’s”. First the “do’s”.

Paul writes “Rejoice always...”. And some will ask, “For what and how can we rejoice always?” Well, let’s consider the following: In His instructions to disciples, Jesus said, “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” (Jn. 16:33)

There is no promise in Scripture that this world, left to itself, will get better. It doesn’t exist! There is no promise in Scripture that man, or the church, will finally put together a program to get man on the path of peace, happiness and contentment with this world. It doesn’t exist! Jesus promised the church that it will have tribulation because it is connected to Him. The fact is, churches that hold the Scripture to be the inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative Word of God are completely out of step with this world’s and the liberal church’s wants and demands.

We’re sinners living in a sinful world doomed to its final moment. Our rejoicing is in the fact that Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you.” (Jn. 14:27) **Not as the world gives do I give to you.** That peace flows from sin forgiven. It flows from Jesus’ words: “whoever believes has eternal life.” (Jn. 6:47) It’s the peace of knowing God’s love is there in the midst of this world’s upheaval. It’s with us when a loved one dies, when we’re rushed to the ER, when we’re crying and fearful over the unexpected moments and tragedies, when we face the final moment. In the midst of the battle with the sin that is still in us, it is our Lord Jesus Who says, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden (and that with sin and guilt), and I will give you rest (mercy, forgiveness and every assurance of God’s love and eternal life).” (Matt. 11:28)

Combined with that is the call to “pray without ceasing”; that for the needed strength and the call to “give thanks in all circumstances.” And the reason is clear, as Paul says, “for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (vv. 17,18) The point? Everything God bids us to do keeps us connected to Him - not to this world. As the Holy Spirit reveals:

If then you have been raised with Christ, **seek the things that are above**, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (So, what are we seeking? What we can get out of this world?) Set your minds on things that are above, **not on things that are on earth**. (What is our mind set?) For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Col. 3:1-4)

God help us to become very familiar and comfortable with that piece of Scripture!

III. The Do Nots.

And, now, the “do not’s”. “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; (and with that a couple of do’s) hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.” (vv. 19-22)

You’ll recall that God admonishes us with these words, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” (Phil. 2:12) Again, he is not saying “do good works and thereby pay for your sins, earn God’s love and eternal life.” He’s saying, “Do everything to protect the faith the Holy Spirit has given

you.” ***Do not quench the Spirit.*** We must lock into that this Word of God: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control...” (Gal. 5:22,23a) The fruit of the Spirit is what we put to practice in our person-to-person relationships: marriage, parenting, respect of parents, other family and friends – all people.

Tied to that is “Do not despise prophecies...”, that is, do not despise, neglect, ignore the revealed Word of God - that Book that stands in front of you in the pew. The writer of Hebrews says, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in the last days he has spoken to us by his Son...” (Heb. 1:1,2a) We have God’s revealed Word in front of us - The Scriptures and Sacraments - the Word that gives life, guidance, strength and comfort. God forbid that it should be neglected! In fact, Paul writes, “...test everything (we do make judgment calls); hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.” There is a struggle involved, not to pay for our sins but to protect the gift of forgiveness and eternal life given us in Christ!

Brothers and sisters, what we don’t need is another round of **holi-daze**. This world’s wants and thinking will stand before Judgment on that Great Day of Christ’s return. As Peter says, our goal is that of “obtaining the outcome of (our) faith, the salvation of (our) souls.” (I Pet. 1:9)

We have been lifted out of the **daze**. God use us to lift out others!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

3rd Sunday of Advent

December 17, 2017

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***“Moving Beyond the Moment . . .
Guidance for the Holi-Daze”***

I. The Daze.

II. The Do's.

III. The Do Nots.

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