

Ready to meet the Lord? Sermon 6/11/11
Fr. Hugh. St. George.
I Thessalonians 4:13-18. Matthew 25:1-13

A British man went on vacation to sunny St. Petersburg. He got into a taxi to head down to see the old part of town. As they approached the harbor he leaned forward to ask the driver a question and tapped him on the shoulder.

The driver screamed, let go of the steering wheel, nearly hit a bus, drove over the curb, and stopped just inches from the edge of the water.

For a minute there was complete silence in the cab, while each of them let out a long breath. Then the driver, still shaking, said,
“I’m sorry, but you scared the devil out of me.”

My terrified fellow countryman said,
"I'm sorry too. I just didn't imagine that tapping you
on the shoulder would be such a shock."

The driver replied, "Well. You see, today is my first
day driving a cab... For the last 25 years I've been
driving a hearse!"

Today's readings are heavy stuff about being
prepared for the end of times.

After reading the lessons I thought I should give the
sermon the title:

"He's coming. Are you going?"

A lot of people have predicted the end of the world
and come up with elaborate calculations to pinpoint
the exact date.

The author Hal Lindsey predicted the end of the world would be in 1988. Oops! Then he moved the date forward to 2007. Wrong again. Oh well.

More recently, preacher and radio host [Harold Camping](#) stated that the end of the world would take place earlier this year on May 21st.

Well, I knew that wasn't going to happen because May 21st is my mother's birthday and God would not do that.

The moral of this tale is if you're going to pick a date for the end of the world pick one long after you're going to be gone, so you don't look quite so silly when it doesn't happen.

But if these self proclaimed prophets were paying attention they would know that Jesus said very clearly that it is not our business to predict the date for the day of Judgment. In this morning's gospel reading he said, "Keep awake, for you do not know the day nor the hour."

The point is we know it's going to happen one day, and it doesn't matter when. Whether we die in the normal way, or the End Times come upon us and we all go together makes little difference. We're all going to have a day of judgment.

Death is the great equalizer, and has no regard to how successful, or strong-willed, or healthy you might be.

The important thing is to be spiritually prepared to meet the Lord any time.

When Sir Winston Churchill was in his last days and laying in bed, with his ever present cigar, a Church of England priest asked him if he was ready to meet the Lord.

Churchill replied,

"I am indeed quite ready to meet my Maker.

Whether the good Lord is prepared for the ordeal of meeting me is another question."

Death is an inevitable fact of life. Here in the Villages, with our senior population, death inevitably occurs with considerable frequency.

And as Christians it behooves us to reflect on this from time to time, so that we are better able to handle both the loss of people we love, and to be prepared for our own demise when the time comes.

People want to know what happens when you die.

Some time back one of our parishioners who was suffering from stage four cancer looked me in the eye and said, "I don't know how to die. Will you help me to die?"

I was honored to visit her at home and in hospice, and talk and pray with her, before she she passed on in a sweet state of peace a few weeks later.

I've lost count of the number of hospice visits; the tearful meetings with families; and the funerals that I've done.

St. Paul heard all the same questions and was addressing these issues with the Thessalonian people in his letter we read this morning.

In the pagan world there was no hope of life after death.

A common inscription on a pagan grave read,

"I was not. I became. I am not. I care not."

Wow. That's gloomy!

There are still people who believe this, and it is the official position of atheists -

That we came from nowhere. We're going nowhere; and in the end life is meaningless. How dreadfully depressing!

I feel sorry for people who have to face death without faith. It's hard enough as it is, but to have no hope of life after death, or of ever seeing each other again in Heaven is terminal hopelessness.

Some years ago Dr. Maurice Rawlings published a book called "Beyond death's door."

Dr. Rawlings was a committed atheist who considered religion to be just a load of hocus pocus and thought that death was nothing more than extinction.

As a specialist in Cardiovascular disease, Dr. Rawlings had resuscitated a number of people who were reckoned to be clinically dead and past the point of no return.

But one day something happened to him that changed everything for him.

He resuscitated a man several times who was absolutely terrified and screaming like a maniac. Rawlings wrote, "Each time he regained heartbeat and respiration, the patient screamed, 'I'm in hell!' He was terrified and pleaded with me to help him. I was scared to death."

He had a terrified look.

His grotesque grimace expressed sheer horror.

His pupils were dilated and he was perspiring and trembling - he looked as if his hair was on end.

Then still another strange thing happened.

He said, "Don't you understand? I'm in Hell. Don't let me go back to Hell!"

The man was serious and it finally occurred to me that he was indeed in trouble.

Dr. Rawlings, in spite of his atheistic views, said "no-one who could have heard his screams and seen the look of terror on his face could doubt for a single minute that he was actually in a place called hell."

The doctor came to an important conclusion.

He stated, "Until you know where you are going, it's just not safe to die!"

Back in England there is an old gravestone that reads:

"Pause my friends as you walk by;

As you are now, so once was I.

As I am, so you will be.

Prepare my friends to follow me."

Then in a piece of ancient churchyard graffiti
someone had added:

"To follow you
is not my intent,
until I know
which way you went."

St. Paul wrote about these very issues. He didn't get
his views from CNN or Oprah. He learned them
directly from the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord is the only person we can trust to teach us
what happens when you die, because He went

through it. He lived. He died and He rose again from the dead. It gives Him a unique and powerful perspective, don't you think?

The Bible repeatedly teaches us that Jesus will return. That 'Christ will come again' is stated over 300 times in the Bible, and we affirm this truth every Sunday in our Eucharistic prayer.

One of the most beautiful things about being a Christian and something that becomes more important to us with each passing year, is the promise of eternal life.

And as you get older you start to reach a point where you have more friends in Heaven than you have here.

It is a wonderful thing to be able to confidently anticipate eternal life in Heaven with the Lord.

There is no other way to receive this promise than through the Lord.

I am sometimes asked if we'll be able to recognize each other in Heaven.

My answer is, 'Absolutely, without a doubt'.

Do you imagine we'll be less smart in Heaven than we are here? Without the limitations of failing eyesight and faltering memory, of course we will recognize and know each other.

So it's little wonder the Lord tells us to love one another and forgive each other. We're going to be together for an awfully long time. We might as well start getting along well with everyone, here and now.

This Sunday is the Sunday after All Saint's Day, a special time of the year, when we celebrate the lives of all believers, whether from the long distant past, or from our own past, or friends and family in the here and now on earth.

We are all part of the Body of Christ, reaching accross time and place.

We who have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ will all enjoy eternity together as the Communion of Saints.