

## End Times

Many of us here are in the second half of our lives. We would like to pretend that we're "middle-aged", I know that I do. But if this is the middle, I will live to be 126 years old. This is highly unlikely. How many of us have found ourselves saying, "Ugh! I don't want to do (blank)" but have found ourselves doing it anyway? That happens to me, but usually not around ministry, so don't worry. Those of us in the "second half" tend to grow weary of repeated tasks; other times, we are just plain "tired." We know that the end may be in sight, especially if we don't want to host Thanksgiving dinner for twenty people anymore.

Those who have put together the Lectionary cycle put readings for the "end times" on the Sundays before the First Sunday of Advent. The First Sunday of Advent signifies the start of the new cycle or, if you will, the liturgical "New Year." For those keeping track, we are completing Year C and will begin Year A on November 30. So, for this week and next, the Lectionary gives us readings to reflect the "end times." This week, we are able to consider all three readings.

The prophet Isaiah foretold “describes God's promise to create 'new heavens and a new earth,' a new creation where suffering and hardship are gone. In this renewed world, there will be no more weeping or crying, and the people will build and eat the fruit of their labor for generations. This new creation is also described as a time of peace where animals will live in harmony with no one being harmed or destroyed.” We love the vision of the lion, wolf, and lamb all lying together in the peaceable kingdom. How we long for this to be in our times, especially today, where everyone is at each other on the “right” way to live or how to exist.

Paul’s second letter to the church in Thessalonica deals with the end times as well. Paul exhorts the Thessalonians that “anyone unwilling to work should not eat.” What happened was that the followers of “The Way” in Thessalonica were convinced that Jesus was going to return and thought it was imminent. This was a common thought among many of the followers. However, the folks in Thessalonica thought that they should just loaf instead of working. Some Scripture scholars believe that instead of loafing, the rogue

Thessalonians were rabble-rousing and making fun of those who were working.

It should be noted that many people today reference this verse from “the Bible” when saying folks who rely on SNAP benefits are lazy and refuse to work. In the past, almost four years, I have ministered closely to our neighbors who are either unhoused or suffer from disabilities that do not permit them to work or hold on to employment. These are NOT the people who should be in question. Jesus never asked his disciples to qualify anyone hungry, naked, or in need of shelter. ‘Nuff said.

Those who were waiting for the end times also tried to live their lives to perfection as true followers of “The Way” that had been laid out for them. The Thessalonians, as well as other followers, shared what they had and made sure that those who could not feed themselves or take care of themselves were provided with what they needed to survive.

While some simply tried to survive, Jesus tells his followers what they might have to endure to continue to be disciples. He tells them there are going to be wars, “nations will rise against nations,” as well as

“earthquakes, famines, and plagues.” We have certainly seen all of these. Jesus also tells his followers that their very lives may be asked of them. And their very lives may come to an end because of something their parents or siblings have said about them. When the early Christians were being persecuted, some were even “turned in” by their parents and siblings, just as Jesus foretold.

Even in 2025, we see religious persecution and martyrs who continue to die for their religious beliefs. Now, lest we become too discouraged and be like those Thessalonians who loafed or rabble-roused, we also know that we are called to continue to work together to bring about the Kingdom or Reign of God here on earth. Like the “good” Thessalonians, we are called to share our gifts with the community and to care for those who are in need. We are called to encourage those who simply loaf, correct those who rabble-rouse or spread false information, or cause issues.

Yes, some of us are in the “second half” or even the “fourth quarter” of our lives. Heck, even Texas A&M came back from a twenty-five-point deficit and shut out South Carolina to win their game in the

second half yesterday. We aren't finished yet! Some of us have more energy than others, and some are more fit than those who have illnesses or injuries, but we can all work together to bring the Kingdom, Kin-dom, or Reign of God on earth here in the greater Westfield/Southwick area.