

“Good News/Bad News”
Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

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I hope we all had a happy Thanksgiving. Did you? Did you have a happy Thanksgiving? Did you come or did you go? Did people come to you, or did you go to someone else?

Let me ask, was it a burden or was it a joy? Think of all the preparation you did, especially if people came to you. Was it a burden? Was it a joy? Was it maybe both?

All that time you spent cleaning the bathroom, vacuuming, mopping, fresh sheets on the guest bed, buying food and hauling it in. Who's a vegetarian? Who's a vegan? Who's allergic to wheat, or onions, or dairy? Whose Thanksgiving will be ruined, ruined beyond redemption, if you don't have the traditional, homemade cranberry sauce?

Was it a burden? Was it a joy? Was it both?

Why do we do this? Why do we go through all this hassle? What's the point? Because we've always done it? Because we can't say 'NO'? Because we've been doing it for so long, we don't know how NOT to? Maybe.

But many of us, I'm sure, genuinely enjoy it. We do. We like it. It doesn't make us euphoric. Vacuuming the floors doesn't make us Happy, Happy, Happy! But mostly we enjoy it. We're excited, eager, glad to do it - because we love them. We're glad to do all that preparation because we love the people coming to Thanksgiving. And when our guests arrive, all that time spent preparing seems like nothing, because we're so glad to see them. We rejoice to be with those we love.

As Christians, we know someday we will meet Jesus face-to-face. Maybe in this life, maybe in the next, no one knows when, but as Christians we know we will all someday meet Jesus face-to-face. For many of us that will be a genuinely joyful event. We love Jesus for his gift of salvation and his constant presence with us. We want to see him and thank him face-to-face.

And so, in preparation, we live the way Jesus wants us to live. Lives of generosity, of self-giving love, of watching out for the impoverished, the powerless. We don't live this way because we have to. No. We live this way because we want to. We prepare our lives to meet Jesus every day because we want to. Not because we must. Because we want to.

Is it frustrating, sometimes? Is it difficult? Is it a burden? Of course it is! We're human. Sometimes, things wear us down. Constantly forgiving those who sin against us gets old. But it's worth it. It's worth it do it as well as we can because some day, we will have the joy of meeting Jesus face-to-face. That's exciting. We want to be ready.

I know our Epistle and Gospel lessons don't give that impression. They make God into some kind of ultra-Puritan Sky-bully who's going to zap us if we put \$5 on the Packers to win tonight. (Though if we are putting \$5 on the Packers to win maybe we need to be zapped.)

We need to remember these texts were written to new Christians who were trying to figure out what it means to live like Jesus. Christians were a minority in this world. This was a world where, especially in Rome, a quiet evening of drinks with friends could easily turn into drunken debauchery. These young Christians need it spelled out for them. They need a strong push.

We don't need that. We know God is a God of love. We know when Jesus comes in his glory weapons will become instruments of peace. Tanks will become tractors. Missile silos will become grain bins. Nation will not make war against nation. Siblings will get along. Every stranger will receive a helping hand. This is the time

we are looking forward to with eager, joyful expectation. And every day we prepare for it by the godliness of our lives.

Friends, I have good news and bad news. The bad news is Jesus is coming. If we are living an ungodly life, we will be overwhelmingly sad at how much time we have wasted. Time we could have been walking with Jesus, living his life of self-giving love. That's the bad news.

The good news (remember, with God there is always good news) the good news is Jesus is coming. When we see Jesus face-to-face, all the time we spent preparing will seem like nothing, because we will rejoice to be with him. We will walk in the light of the Lord. We will worship God together, and we will live in peace. Thanks be to God. Amen.