**Third Sunday of End Time-Saints Triumphant Sunday**

**Sermon Text:** 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

**Theme:**  Good grief?

 Charles Schulz, creator of the classic cartoon strip “Peanuts,” gave us catchphrases that still resonate with many of us today.

 Most people are familiar with the idea of a **security blanket**, which is a blanket carried around by a Linus especially as he sat all night in the pumpkin patch waiting for the Great Pumpkin to arrive. Schulz himself may have been the one to coin and popularize the term. Blockhead is Lucy’s number one insult for good ol’ Charlie Brown. Then there are the phases that were Charlie Brown’s signature method of expressing disappointment.  [Remember](https://www.dictionary.com/browse/remember) when the gang chewed him out for bringing back that scrawny Christmas tree? That was a classic “**Rats!**” moment.

 **“Good grief”** was the go-to expression of frustration for Charlie Brown. We know that grief is a “cause or occasion of great distress or sorrow,” so how can that be *good*, Charlie? In reality it was used to advertise and accentuate his grief. He grief was actually “ large or great.” If you miss kicking a football for the 100th time, only get rocks in your bag on trick treat or crash your kite into a kite-eating tree, this phrase makes total sense.

 In our text for today, Paul points out that some of the Thessalonians were grieving over the death of fellow believers. Their grief, in Paul’s view, was no different than that of the unsaved Thessalonians. Paul’s words in our text show us that as a Christian, we should have a very different of the death of a Christian, which can result in a dramatically different response to death, a response that I would call **“Good Grief.”**

 When we go to a funeral, we grieve. It is natural for us to feel very sorry at the loss of life. However, grief and loss that death brings does not really hit us hard until someone who is very close to us dies. It is then that we realize how difficult it is to struggle against hopelessness and despair, and to be able to come to terms with death. No words can ever describe the devastating trauma of losing a loved one.

 How does one cope with death? Paul was dealing with people who had a very pessimistic view of death. **We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you do not grieve in the same way as the others, who have no hope.** Most of the tombstones in this Roman Province where pagan were written with the words “Taken away” on them. One could say it this way today. **“Lived! Died! Done!”** No hope. Just grief!

 How should you, the Christian respond if you were to lose your parent, or your spouse or your child today? How should you deal with all the pain and sorrow it brings? And how should you respond to the grim reality of death when it is your turn to face it? When the time comes for you to die, is there any real comfort that can sustain you effectively on your death bed? Is there any solid hope that you can cling to as your life is slowly slipping away? God has the answer**. Paul shares with us that we can have. “Good grief!”**

**Indeed, if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, then in the same way we also believe that God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus.**

 It seems so cruel: “The Lord gives, the Lord takes away.” Yet, through the eyes of faith we see a bigger picture. One in which life does not simply start and stop. Yes, our experience on this earth is temporal but God points out that he is eternal and that is what he wants for us!

 It’s only a matter of time. And if death only brings grief. If we have no hope. If live is all there is. Then we need to be pitied as Paul says; **“If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Cor. 15:19)**

Now, listen to the words of hope. **In fact, we tell you this by the word of the Lord: We who are alive and left until the coming of the Lord will certainly not go on ahead of those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them, to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord.**

 How different it is to attend a Christian funeral. Where there is much comfort. The Word being read, preached and sung. Assurance and comfort from God’s promises is there. Did you know that most of the tombstones in the Roman Catacombs (underground cemetery) where Christians were buried the words “**He sleeps in peace”** (dormit) are engraved. They regarded death as a sleep, and so their burial places were like dormitories. Do you know that the word “cemetery” means? It comes from a Greek word which literally means **“a sleeping place.”**

 In our text you will notice that Paul refers to Christians who have passed away as “them which are asleep**” three times** (vv.13,14 and 15). But in v.14 he said that Jesus died. Why did he not say that Jesus had fallen asleep?

 It is interesting that Christ’s death is never mentioned as ‘falling asleep’ in Bible. Why is this so? It is because it was not sleep but death with all its full terror. Before He went to the cross Jesus dreaded the darkness of death (Luke 22:42 – “**Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me…**”). When He was crucified He felt the sting of death. When God the Father forsook Him, He bore the awful curse of death; **My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?** (Matthew 27:46). As He expired, He submitted to the power of death; “**And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death- even death on a cross!”** (Philippians 2:7). And as His lifeless body lay in the tomb for three days.

 Dearly loved, when Jesus died He experienced death and all its terror for us. Now Because of his resurrection, death has lost its sting and has been transformed to sleep! How wonderful it is that our death is now called sleep! What is there to fear in falling asleep? Sleep implies rest which is a most welcome prospect for bodies that are all weary and worn after al long day.

 Paul Hope says now; **Therefore, encourage one another with these words.** Hope! We have real hope. It makes me think about Charlie Brown again. Lucy tells Charlie Brown that she will hold a football while he comes running up and kicks it. Charlie Brown usually refuses to kick it at first, not trusting Lucy. Lucy then says something to persuade Charlie Brown to trust her., Lucy removes the ball and Charlie Brown flies into the air, before falling down on his back and hurting himself. Then comes the phrase; **Good Grief!** The gag usually ends with Lucy pointing out to Charlie Brown that he should not have trusted her. What about us! Can we trust Jesus! Or will our hope during the grief of loss be pulled form us as we go up to kick the ball? Jesus say no! Trust me! You know me! I have brought you this far! I will bring you to be with me! So as we go up to the football. Think of it this way. We do not need to kick it. Jesus will kick it for us. Just like the Bobby Bare’s Country Song from 1976. Drop kick me, Jesus through the goal posts of life. End over end, neither left nor to right. Straight through the heart of them righteous uprights. Drop kick me, Jesus through the goal posts of life. Make me, oh make me, Lord more than I am. Good grief indeed! **Amen**