

## Advent Devotional December 3, 2023

### Scripture

#### 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11

*1 Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. 2 For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! 4 But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; 5 for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. 6 So then let us not fall asleep as others do but let us keep awake and be sober; 7 for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. 9 For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.*

### Devotion

**The Rev. Dr. Angela Dienhart Hancock, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty and Howard C. Scharfe Associate Professor of Homiletics**

Why do people say things that don't need to be said?

It's a good question to ask when reading this passage from one of Paul's letters to the church in Thessalonica. Paul claims his readers don't need to hear what he has to say, but he says it anyway.

On the surface, Paul's message is simple: there are good alert day people (his readers) and bad clueless night people (others). But that binary disintegrates if you read the text closely. Why does Paul need to tell us to be sober and alert if we already are? Why tell us to put on the equipment of faith, hope, and love if we are already wearing it? We are children of light, sure, sometimes, but not all the time, it seems. It's not just the day of the Lord that will come like a thief in the night, perhaps. Maybe doubt and fear sneak up on all of us some of the time. Paul doesn't come right out and say it, but he knows. It slips out in verse 10: Christ died for us, even when we are among the sleepers. Because we are both awake and asleep, in brightness and in shadow, we need encouragement, building up, and reminding from time to time.

We are going to hear and say and sing many things at Advent that we already know. "God is on the way," we sing, "bringing this world to a good end." We know this. But the night pulls on all of us, in spite of what we know.

I don't know whether you are brimming with faith, hope, and love today or lulled into shadow, but either way, God has got you. It doesn't need to be said, except when it does.

### Prayer

God of the alert and the drowsy, we thank you for the ways you remind us that you are bringing the world to a good end. When we are alert and brimming with hope, empower us to build up the weary. On days when hopelessness blurs our memory, may we be carried by the encouragement of others. Amen.