

Preached by Dr. Carl A. Rush
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church
Alexandria, VA 22310
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Isaiah 1:1, 10–20
Hebrews 11:1–3, 8–16

NO THIEVES AND NO MOTHS

Jesus is coming back to earth. And if our scriptures weren't enough to remind us about the central belief that we are not here and this is not all there is, there are often reminders as we drive down the road. I saw them this week on the back of a car: a bumper sticker that said, "Jesus is coming and boy is he upset!" Or, as we Presbyterians might say if we had bumper stickers to announce our faith, "Jesus is coming; try to look busy."

But the text this morning is the ultimate in affirming what we believe. If Syl Shannon was here, he would prompt me to say the words that he loves so much: Jesus came, Jesus died and was resurrected, and Jesus is coming again. It's gospel. You could put that entire message on a postcard, can't you? And it is everything that is important to us. But very often we think of Jesus' return and our culture, or maybe the fact that we live so close to the Bible belt, and this prompts us also to feel uneasy about that. If Jesus is returning—and he is—what will that mean for us?

What will the consequences be of Christ's return for us? And what does Christ say to us in Luke? "Don't be afraid" Don't be afraid—be purposeful in what you do now. Prepare for eternity now. Be ready to live as if that eternal existence has already started. Maybe when we read a passage like this, we'd do well to catch up a bit with what has come before and what comes after. I have to say that Peter today really punctuates what Jesus just said. Listen to what Peter says in the very next verse: "Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for everyone?"

It kind of funny when you think about it. Peter is saying, "Lord, is this just for us to receive—all these wonderful things that are going to happen and these extraordinary requirements: are they just us or do they apply to everyone?" And to Peter, we say, yes, they are just for us; and yes, they do apply to everyone.

This morning I came down our steps in our home. We live in a house that, to put it mildly, is built not to code. The steps are narrower than they are supposed to be and taller than they are supposed to be. It would be easy in a sleepy fog to make a misstep; I was being careful to hold on with both hands and to take the steps one at a time.

I thought this morning about the man who was upstairs and he was sure that he was living his last day. He was in bed and feeling terrible, waiting for his last breath, when suddenly he caught the aroma of his favorite food wafting up the stairs—chocolate chip cookies. And so he carefully, gingerly, eased himself down those steps like I did this morning. And using all of his energy he got to the door of the kitchen and there on the table was a mountain of fresh-baked chocolate chip cookies. He thought, "I have

enough energy; I can do it.” And he caught himself on the table, kind of fell in a crumpled heap, but he was able to reach up. He could already taste the cookie in his mouth when he felt a sting on his hand. And he looked up. His wife had slapped the back of his hand with the spatula she’d used to put those cookies out of the oven, and she said, “Have you lost your mind? Those are for the funeral.”

Is that what we think? Is that how we anticipate Christ’s second coming? Living as if eternity has already started? Living as those who are willing not to hold so tightly to our possessions because we know how easy it is for our possessions to hold tight to us. I think often we elevate Jesus’ concern for the poor as if being poor is virtuous, and somehow being productive and earning a reasonable wage is not. We talk about God’s concern for the poor. I think, in fact, God’s greatest concern is that we might forget that generosity is at the heart of trusting in Jesus. But you can’t be stingy with your forgiveness or with all the blessings in your life.

In just a moment you’re going to hear a little of Irene Woods’ story, but I’m going to take some liberty here and tell you that she learned about Bush Hill Presbyterian second hand. Because Mike Broderick was talking to a friend of his about how much he loved Bush Hill Church and what a great place it was, and that friend repeated the story to Irene and Irene thought, “I’m looking for a place like that—where people are loving. I’m looking for a church like that.” She came by and, lo and behold, today she is becoming an active member here, although she’s already been very active before.

Jesus is asking us today to be that open with one another about what we love. And we love this community. We love one another. We love being there for one another. We love celebrating with one another. But how often do we ever talk about that with those around us. Just think, if Mike hadn’t shared his love with a friend, Irene might not be here today. The Bible is asking us, Jesus is asking us, to understand that trusting in God has implications. We are to be generous, not just appear to be generous. We are to be accepting and supportive of one another and not just giving those things lip service. We are to be alert to kingdom opportunities.

We are to understand that it is God’s pleasure to give us all that he promised to Abraham and all that He promises for eternity. And it starts *now*. That’s why we can say, “Come Lord Jesus; come quickly and not be afraid.”

So may it be.