

## “Come before Winter”

2 Timothy 4:6-13, 19-21a;

First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, Illinois  
October 30, 2022, All Saints Day  
Matt Matthews

Thomas Wolfe wrote, "All things on earth point home in old October; sailors to sea, travelers to walls and fences, hunters to field and hollow and the long voice of the hounds, the lover to the love he has forsaken."<sup>[1]</sup> All things on earth point home in old October . . .

With home are the people of home. Paul seeks a homecoming with his friend Timothy. Notice the urgency in Paul's words. *Come to me as soon as you can, Timothy. Do your best to come before winter.*

Paul is saying goodbye to Timothy. He knows he's near the end of his life. He's putting his affairs in order. He's making a list. *Timothy, please come to me soon. Bring Mark with you. Bring my cloak with you, and the books, and the parchments. Greet Prisca and the others . . . Do your best to come before winter.*

Paul reminds us that no season lasts forever. There are things that need to get done now if they are going to get done at all. If we put things off too long, we'll put them off forever. There's no time like the present. That application needs to be turned in. That visit needs to be made.

Paul knows—as we surely know—that winter will be here sooner than we think. Our good intentions may be frozen if we don't act on them now. Before it's too late. Before an unexpected storm sweeps away our opportunity to act.

Some of us have old friends we need to see, or important projects to finish. If we pass on the opportunity now, we may be passing forever. Paul reminds us winter is coming.

Notice Paul's urgency. *If you can, Timothy, come before winter.*

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Every autumn from the pulpit of Second Presbyterian Church in Little Rock, Dr. Allen Smith preached the same sermon. It was called "Come Before Winter."<sup>[2]</sup> It was based on this text from Second Timothy. Allen's son Jim gave me a book of Allen's sermons after Allen died. This sermon still seizes me. (And in the fall, I often preach some version of this sermon.)

Allen's message, stolen from Paul, is that there are some things worth doing now, because tomorrow could be too late.

Today we celebrate the people in our flock who have died this year. For them, they have run their race. But we have unknown miles yet ahead of us. What is God inviting us to do, or to become, now, before winter?

*"When you come [Timothy], bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments . . . Do your best to come before winter."*

Paul knew that, because time was short, some things needed doing right now, before the ice of winter makes them impossible to do, before the roads freeze, and the path becomes impassable.

Allen Smith put it this way: "How precious our opportunities are when we realize that they do not last forever. The simple statement, 'Come before winter,' reminds us that life has limits . . . Opportunities come along and, if not seized, they are lost forever. Time passes . . . That is what Jesus meant when he said,

'While it is day, I must do the work of the one who sent me; but night comes, when no one shall work.' It is day—but night comes."

Night falls. Frost rises. And winter sets in.

Jesus is always saying to us, "*Come, follow me. Before the December wind scatters the leaves of your good intentions. Come to me before your heart grows cold and your desires fade and your opportunity is gone.*"<sup>[1]</sup>

Summer appears to be long gone. Some opportunities for some of us have forever passed us by. The frost is on the pumpkin. The leaves are changing. Some opportunities are ready to be seized now.

Before winter.

Before it's too late.

AMEN.

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[1] Thomas Wolfe, *No Door*, p. 84, The Complete Short Stories of Thomas Wolfe, Scribners & Sons, 1987.

[2] Allen Smith, "Come Before Winter," from The Sovereignty of God's Grace, Second Presbyterian Church, Little Rock, AR, 1992.

[3] Allen Smith.