Donnybrook
31 August 2021

Welcome
Paul had impressed upon the Thessalonian believers that Jesus would come again soon. It is understandable that they would ask, well, when? Paul cannot give an answer, which is no surprise, because even Jesus himself said he did not know. Instead, Paul gives a teaching on time.

Steps
He unfolds that teaching with three images: a pregnant woman, a household robber and a soldier. Paul was not original in using the image of pregnancy: something new was coming to birth, and it was inevitably going to happened at the right time. He was also not so original in using the image of the robber – already used by Jesus. Even in those days, robbers didn't let you know beforehand that they would be paying a visit. Using these images, Paul teaches that the second coming, the completion of God's project with humanity, was both inevitable and unpredictable. We can easily translate that concern: the end of our own lives is inevitable and (mostly) unpredictable.

If that is the case, how should we act in the present moment? Here, Paul is original. He switched metaphors to a military image:

> Night is the time for sleepers to sleep and night the time for drunkards to be drunk, but we belong to the day and we should be sober; let us put on faith and love for a breastplate, and the hope of salvation for a helmet. (1 Thessalonians 5:7–8 NJB)

Suddenly, his favourite triad comes up: faith, love and hope. This triad was already mentioned at the start of 1 Thessalonians:

> We always thank God for you all, mentioning you in our prayers continually. We remember before our God and Father how active is the faith, how unsparing the love, how persevering the hope which you have from our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 1:2–3 NJB)

And it comes up famously in 1 Corinthians 13: faith, hope and love, these abide and the greatest of these is love.

Conclusion
The past is the past. The future is not yet. All we have is the present moment. Paul invites us to live now, today, the great virtues of faith, hope and love.