

Sermon for December 1, 2013 – Advent 1

Romans 13:11-14 (AAT)

Theme: Wake up and Get Dressed!

- 1) *Understand What It Means to Be Spiritually Awake*
- 2) *Understand What It Means to Be Clothed with Christ*

¹¹ Do this especially since you know the time we're living in. It's time now for you to wake up from sleep because we are now nearer being rescued than when we first believed. ¹² The night is almost over, and the day is dawning. Then let us put away the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us live nobly as in the daytime, not carousing or getting drunk, not sinning sexually or living wildly, not quarreling or being jealous. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and don't plan to have your fleshly desires aroused.

When I was a child, I had a silly little fear about Judgment Day: I was afraid of being in the shower when Christ returned. I thought, "Wouldn't that be embarrassing: being whisked up into the air naked with everyone looking at me. What a way to stand before Christ!" This is why, whenever I showered as a child, my clothes were not too far away from me. I even practiced putting them on quickly. I wanted to be prepared.

In our text for this morning, St. Paul encourages us to be dressed and ready for Christ's return. Now the clothes that St. Paul speaks about are not physical clothes. He is encouraging us to be spiritually ready for Christ's return. Let us take his encouragement seriously: **Wake up and get dressed!** *1) Understand What It Means to Be Spiritually Awake. 2) Understand What It Means to Be Clothed with Christ.*

Part One: Understand What It Means to be Spiritually Awake.

Our sermon text is taken from Paul's letter to the Romans. In this section of Scripture, the apostle encourages us to lead a sanctified life; that is a life "made holy" by the power of the Holy Spirit. How does God's Spirit make us holy? By creating faith in our hearts through the Gospel. God declares every repentant sinner who looks to his Son for forgiveness holy. In other words: faith in Jesus is our holiness before God. Because we are holy through faith, we will want to exhibit this holiness in our words and actions. What follows can't be stressed enough: We don't keep God's law in order to be holy, rather because we are already holy through faith in Christ, we will want to keep God's law.

If you want a one word summary of what it means to keep God's law, it would be this: love. Right before our text St. Paul encourages us to love God by loving each other, for, as the Apostle says: "*love is the fulfillment of the Law (13:10).*" What does it mean to love? Does it mean we're supposed have a fuzzy feeling for everyone? No. The love God speaks about is not a feeling, it's an action. It's doing everything to benefit of our neighbor. Our text this morning doesn't start off by saying, "Feel this," but rather: *Do this (love each other), especially since you know the time we're living in. It's time now for you to wake up from sleep because we are now nearer being rescued than when we first believed.*

Paul tells us that we need to wake up because the time is near. When we sleep, we tend to miss things. When I was a child, living in Canada, there was once the most beautiful northern lights display in decades. Not only did the lights paint the sky green, but also red and blue. They were very bright. The next morning

everyone was talking about how beautiful the sight was. The problem was that I missed it. I slept through the entire display. My parents tried to wake me up, but I wouldn't because I was too sleepy.

Physical sleep is not the only thing that causes us to miss out on God's wonderful works. Spiritual sleep does the same thing. What is spiritual slumber? It's complacency. It's not taking time to read God's Word, or come to Church, because we think we know it all already. When we neglect prayer or, even worse, reading and hearing God's Word, our faith starts to slowly shut its eyes. It doesn't see what's going on. And as our faith falls more and more asleep, the harder it is to wake it up.

We easily make mistakes when we're sleepy – even deadly ones. I have driven a few times when I shouldn't have, when I was a little too tired. It's by God's grace that I am alive today. But for every time the Lord woke us up in the last moment while driving, there are others who didn't wake up and crashed their cars. The same is true regarding our faith. As we are driving down the road of life, if our eyes of faith start to get heavy and begin to close, we aren't aware of the dangers ahead. Yes, there were times when God woke us up in the last moment, before we fell into greater sin – for example, He may have broken up a romantic relationship that was getting too physical before marriage. But aren't there other times when we crashed because of our spiritual slumber? Maybe not a deadly, faith destroying crash, but one that did leave scars. Again, maybe it was a relationship actually went too far. Maybe it was getting caught doing drugs. Maybe it was losing the trust of your friends because of gossiping. Thankfully the LORD saved your eternal life by bringing you to repentance; but the danger is always present that if we slumber spiritually, we might die eternally.

And this is why the apostle Paul encourages us to wake up. The time of Christ's coming is even closer than when we first believed. Judgment Day isn't getting further away, but closer with every passing day. Paul wrote these words around 1950 years ago. If this was his attitude then, what should our attitude be now! Christ's coming is imminent.

Wake up! Open your spiritual eyes by reading God's Word. See the dangers in popular music, movies, and on TV. Understand that the pursuit of material possessions is not the main purpose of life. New things will not make our life any happier than living without them in contentment. Wake up and listen to His Word - then you will be able to see Christ, and be reassured of his forgiving love towards you. Reading the Gospel of Christ is like drinking a good cup of strong coffee. It wakes you up and makes you feel really good and happy inside. It makes you alert.

Part Two: Understand What It Means to Be Clothed with Christ

Our text continues: ¹² *The night is almost over, and the day is dawning. Then let us put away the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.* Paul uses the analogy of taking off pajamas and putting on armor. Imagine being a soldier in Afghanistan - camped near a hotspot of insurgency. Would you, at day-break, wake up and crawl out of your tent in your pajamas? No. You probably would think twice about wearing pajamas at all. You would want to be dressed in full body armor. How much more does this apply to us. St. Peter wrote: *Keep a clear head and watch! Your enemy, the devil, is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.* (1 Peter 5:8, AAT).

The devil, the world and our own sinful flesh are constantly looking to attack us. The days are getting worse as we approach Christ's second coming. *"This is why,"* Saint Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians, *"you should take God's whole armor; then you can resist when things are at their worst and having done everything, you can hold your ground."* ¹⁴ *Stand, then, with truth as a belt fastened around your waist, with righteousness covering you as a breastplate,* ¹⁵ *and with shoes on your feet, ready to bring the good news of peace.* ¹⁶ *Besides all these, take faith as the shield with which you can put out all the flaming arrows of the evil one.* ¹⁷ *And take salvation as your helmet, and the Spirit's sword, which is God's Word.* ¹⁸ *Pray at*

all times in the Spirit, using every kind of prayer. Be alert and keep at it continually as you pray for all the holy people (Ephesians 6:13-18, AAT).

Our text says: *Let us live nobly as in the daytime, not carousing or getting drunk, not sinning sexually or living wildly, not quarreling or being jealous.* Our society promotes the very things Paul warns against. The word translated as carousing literally means over-indulgence. The world says, “If you have the means, indulge to your heart’s content. Have no inhibitions. Do what you want.” And we are tempted to ask ourselves: “If everyone else can lose control and live life to the excess, why can’t I?”

Paul also warns against sexual sins and “wild living” (which basically means following every depraved lust a person might have). Why does Paul mention these sins? Are they any worse than other sins? No, but they are sins that captivate the world and truly tempt Christians. Yes, many a Christian has fallen prey to internet pornography, living together with someone outside of marriage, or simply “fooling around”. The devil does a good job trying to convince us that no one will know - that we aren’t really hurting anybody. The world bombards us with a distorted view of sexuality. You can’t open a magazine, turn on the radio, and certainly not watch television without realizing this. Even strong Christians fall into sinning sexually. And when they do, then what? Often, instead of repenting, many are tempted to laugh it off as a minor indiscretion. Others come up with excuses like: “I know living together outside of marriage is generally wrong, but our situation is special.” Or, “Pornography isn’t so bad. I’m just looking – not touching,” all the while forgetting what our Savior once said: *I tell you, anyone who looks at a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:28, AAT)* God desires heartfelt repentance, not excuses.

Quarreling and jealousy are other sins Paul warns about, and Christians are certainly not immune to these sins either. Did you ever notice that it is often the little things that cause the biggest strife in a Christian congregation or marriage? The devil is in the details. He knows how selfish we are - that we are often more willing to compromise on big things than little ones. Consider the irony: A husband might be willing to sacrifice his life for his wife if she was in danger, but he is unwilling to sacrifice watching a football game to help her with the dishes!

Excessive indulgence and drunkenness, sexual immorality and the “party lifestyle”, quarrelling and jealousy - St. Paul knows how dangerous these sins are and that we are certainly not immune to them. This is why he urges us: *put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and don’t plan to have your fleshly desires aroused.*

What does it mean to put on Christ? It means confessing our sinfulness to Jesus - admitting how helpless we are without Him. It also means remembering Christ’s work for us on the cross. It means remembering our baptism, the day we were declared forgiven and clothed with Christ’s righteousness (Galatians 3:27). Being clothed with Christ means that, when God looks at us, He sees his Son and not us; He sees his Son’s righteousness and not our sin. Being clothed with Christ through faith means that we won’t want to arouse any sinful desires any longer. We will confess with St. Paul: *I was crucified with Christ, and I don’t live anymore, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in my body I live by believing in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Galatians 2:20, AAT).*

Brothers and sisters in Christ: Don’t be caught naked on Judgment Day. Wake up and get dressed. Prepare to meet your Savior by clothing yourself with Christ and the good works that flow from faith. How happy it will be for us on that day, and how wonderfully brilliant our spiritual clothes will shine when He comes. Wake up and get dressed. *He who spoke these truths says: “Yes, I am coming soon!” Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! (Revelation 22:20, AAT).*