**Romans 13:11-14** November 27, 2022

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*Romans 13:11 The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 12The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. 14Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**Ready, Even If He Should Surprise Us**

**I. Be Awake for His Arrival**

The headline read, “Soldier surprises family on Thanksgiving Day.” They had hoped he would be back soon. But they hadn’t known the day, and he hadn’t told them. It was a huge surprise to everyone at that Thanksgiving table. Watch the videos and you will see that soldier’s surprise homecomings bring out huge joy every time.

But here is an important part about these surprises: they only work if you have a strong relationship.

If you have a weak relationship it will not be a tearful, happy reunion. If it is a weak relationship, a returning soldier might surprise someone back home, hoping to find out “what is really going on.” Or if it is a weak relationship, the one waiting back home might be acting happy, but thinking, “I wonder why he surprised me. Is he checking up on me? Doesn’t he trust me?” – maybe she is even feeling guilty about something.

Here is another thing: If these people *do* have a strong relationship, even if the wife back home doesn’t expect her husband back for eleven months, she will still be ready for him to come back at any time. Oh, maybe she won’t get her hair done every day. But she will be always glad, always ready to see his face, always sure of his love and confident in her trustworthiness. In a strong relationship, the soldier, too, trusts and knows she will be waiting and glad to see him no matter what day he returns from deployment.

I start like this, because some people who claim the name of Christ don’t seem to care about being ready for his return. In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus told us about his return and said, *“No one knows about that day or hour … Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come”* (Mt 24,36,42) He has gone. He has been gone for a very long time. And so some seem to think, “He’s gone, far away. I don’t know when he’ll be back.” The “Keep watch!” has become, “Who cares?”

Why do so many Christians who know that Jesus bled and died because of their sins, why is it that so many Christians waiting for Jesus’ second coming are perfectly happy to do nothing to get ready for him? They live however they want to live. They are indifferent about Jesus, other than a vague, “I try to do my best.” They seem to be ok with giving him a yawn rather than a cheer. Do you know what this sounds like? It sounds like a broken relationship. It sounds like their Christian “faith” is just a marriage of convenience, and that it would be ok if something else came along. You know what happens to spouses living like that when the soldier returns unexpectedly, right?

Let us not be so unworthy of our Savior! The time of Jesus’ return is 100% uncertain; but that he will return is 100% certain. Maybe he will come back in our lifetimes. Maybe not. Even if not, we will still meet him. Maybe we will meet him in our sleep at 99 years old. Then again, maybe it will be in a car accident at age 18. Or maybe a heart attack, age 52.

Advent is a natural time to renew our readiness. In the four weeks of Advent before Christmas, we wait for the Christ-child’s arrival. We get ready by decorating the church and our homes, having Advent wreaths, warming up the choir. We want to receive our Savior well. These annual Advent/Christmas exercises are also a great time to renew our readiness for Christ’s second coming.

***“The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.”*** (11). Each day lived on this earth is a day closer to when Christ and his people will be physically reunited. Then there will be no more long-distance phone calls (prayer), staring at pictures full of memories (Bible readings). Christ himself will physically appear and we will sit with him at his table in heaven. When Christ returns, his people will receive the final, full deliverance from all the results of sin.

Are you ready for Christ to stand at your door? Or are you pretty much indifferent to the whole situation? Is there a chance you may be put to shame? God’s word tells us, ***“Wake up from your slumber.”***

Wake up, because we are surrounded by enemies. Wake up, because it is possible for people who profess Christ to fall asleep and to fall from faith. Our enemies cannot take us when we are spiritually watchful and remain in Jesus’ strong hands. But if we should get foolish and take our relationship with Jesus for granted, well one hymn-writer wrote,

*I walk in danger all the way; The thought shall never leave me  
That Satan, who has marked his prey, Is plotting to deceive me.  
This foe with hidden snares May seize me unawares  
If e'er I fail to watch and pray; I walk in danger all the way.* (431:1)

Wake up!

**II. Put Off the Clothes of Shame**

Our text expands on the picture of waking from sleep, ***“The night is nearly over… So let us put aside the deeds of darkness… Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.”*** Stop acting like it is night!

Once in a while, after a dreadful crime, reporters interview the neighbors, and you hear people say, “I never thought he could do something like that!” You know what? That criminal succeeded in doing what the sinful nature in each of us is trying to do.

Each of us has a sinful nature that is trying to get away with whatever it can. We each have our own sins and faults that we do everything we can to hide. It can be outright immorality, it can be hidden pride, it can be brutish violence or greed or laziness. Our sinful nature, having had its hand slapped enough times, is very good at letting temptation lie dormant until it knows there are no watching eyes. As soon as the eyes are off, it races into sin. Our sinful nature loves sin. And it loves to hide sin.

But no sin can be hidden from God. Even if Jesus is a long time in coming back, don’t think he doesn’t know, he does. Living in any sin while Christ waits to come a second time is an act of betrayal. It is like one spouse zeroing out the bank account while the other is deployed. It pushes the entire relationship to the brink, maybe even over the brink.

Paul wants these Christians to remain faithful in spite of the long wait for Jesus. ***“Let put aside the deeds of darkness… orgies and drunkenness, sexual immorality and debauchery, dissension and jealousy.”*** We might look at this list and think, “Wow, these supposed Christians set the morality bar pretty low! No wonder they had to be warned.” Remember, these people had grown up pagans. They became Christians late in life. For them, these crass sins had been their lifestyle. They had once lived like this, and so it was a real temptation to go back to the familiar.

If you had strong Christian parents and maybe a Christian grade school education, hopefully this list of sins that Paul writes shocks you. But look carefully at yourself. Your sins may not make for shocking headlines, but there is still a spiritual war inside of you. Little sins condemn just as much as so-called big sins. And if you grew up better, maybe your little sins grieve your Savior more.

You also know that if we outgrow any temptation, our sinful nature just finds a new temptation. For the very young, the greatest temptation is to break out from under the authority of parents and others. Through the young adult years, the most appealing sins are associated with wild living. As we age, the desire for wild living may decrease, but now the sins of indifference to spiritual matters and the pursuit of worldly treasures deceive us. A few more years and we find that worry and self-centeredness, and maybe even pride, are the enemies on the battlefield of our heart.

Paul’s last word of verse 14 reminds us that this really isn’t a battle about sinful actions, it is a battle over what goes on inside. ***“Do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”*** This is where the real battle for getting ready for Christ comes. In the privacy of your own mind, are you battling every thought that would estrange you from Christ? Do you look away from what you should not set your eyes on? Do you stop the unkind thought before it becomes an unkind word? Do you know unflattering things about people but determine to keep it to yourself, and even to do your best to just plain forget it? Are you warring against the desires of your sinful nature? That is what Christ’s people do as they wait for their Savior.

Which makes Paul’s assurance in the verse 11 all the better: ***“Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.”*** We will be fighting temptation every day of our entire lives. We will not fight temptation forever. Jesus came the first time, that first Christmas, to remove the punishment of sin. But at his second coming he will remove any residue of sin. Gone will be the temptations to put God in the backseat. Gone will be the temptations to bend other people to serve what we want whether physically or emotionally. We are only waiting for the day our hero returns and gives us final deliverance.

**III. Put on Jesus’ Armor of Light**

As we draw nearer to the goal. God’s word puts the primary focus not on avoiding sin, but on living in righteousness. He emphasizes not just avoiding the evil that would pull us down, but utilizing the powerful tools God has given us.

Our reading tells us, ***“So let us… put on the armor of light… [and] clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.”*** We arm ourselves with the armor and weapons and nourishment that God provides. God has given us the tools we need in his word. Hear the prophets and apostles and Christ himself teach us. By daily consulting his word, our skills and minds are made sharp. We see through Satan’s schemes to destroy us. We don’t get bogged down in politics or materialism.

We not only conquer temptation, but we also live positively. In place of drunkenness, by God’s strength we strive for sobriety. We prove to our and the next generation that moderation is possible, and even the best way to enjoy God’s blessings. In place of immorality, we strive for self-control which builds up families and society as well as making an enjoyable place for us to live! In place of in-fighting and envy, we serve other people so that their lives too enjoy God’s blessing.

***“Putting on the armor of light”*** and ***“clothing ourselves with Christ”*** means we are always reminding ourselves how much Christ loves us. Witnessing his love, we become more dedicated to him. And so, no matter when he should finally show up at our door to call us home, our surprise will not be the shame of a cheating spouse who gets found out—no, that is what God’s word is here guarding us against—but the surprised joy of a long-expected reunion, of a person who is faithful and confident, and powerful Savior who is even more faithful.

Let these weeks of Advent be a renewal of our readiness for Christ’s coming. Amen.

*This is a re-working of a December 2016 sermon.*