

First Sunday in Advent: November 27, 2022

Romans 13:11-14

“Dress for the Day”

And do this since you understand the present time. It is already the hour for you to wake up from sleep, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is almost over, and the day is drawing near. So let us put away the deeds of darkness and put on the weapons of light. Let us walk decently as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual sin and wild living, not in strife and jealousy. Instead, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not give any thought to satisfying the desires of your sinful flesh.

If this coming winter plays out anything like the last two, it will still be another month until the first snowfall comes into the forecast. When it does, the annual mid-Atlantic overreaction will begin. Locals will stuff their trunks with cases of bottled water and toilet paper, just in case three inches of snow shuts down the world for months. Local news reporters will stand in front of the empty snow shovel rack at The Home Dept and interview scurrying customers. “What are you doing to get ready for the snow?”

If you grew up in the one of the colder parts of this country, all the freaking out over a few inches of snow (which always melts the next day anyhow) is amusing. But of course, you could say, “Better safe than sorry. It’s better to be prepared, even overprepared, than unprepared.” And that’s true too.

Well, readiness for a day of snow is one thing. Near the end of his letter to the Romans, St. Paul encourages all of God’s people to be ready for another kind of day. He calls this day by a couple of different names: **our salvation**, and then later, simply: **the day**.

What day are we talking about here? Well, we all know that The Day on our calendar between now and the end of the year is Christmas Day! The day is the one when Jesus arrives. And Christmas is also the day of our salvation, because Jesus is born in Bethlehem with the mission of saving us from our sins.

But there’s another day coming, too. There’s another day when Jesus will arrive. And that day will also be the day of our salvation. On that day he will save us from all darkness of this world. He will save us from night of disease and pain. He will save us from the darkness of persecution and hatred. Jesus is coming again to rescue us from a world of unbelief. And Paul’s words encourage us: **The night is almost over, and the day is drawing near.**

We know exactly when we celebrate the day of Jesus’ first arrival. We can count the days down to the first day of salvation. When this next day of salvation will be, we don’t know. But we do know one thing about when it will arrive: it’s one day closer than it was yesterday. That might sound so obvious that it’s silly, but listen to what Paul writes: **our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.** Every day we are one solid march closer to the day when Jesus comes again to save. We don’t know when it will be, but we do know it’s getting closer all the time.

So it’s best to be prepared. When God, through Paul’s pen, encourages us to be prepared for the day of salvation, he pictures it in terms of being dressed properly. Probably we all have some embarrassing experiences of being dressed improperly. Maybe you went to a party that turned out to be more formal than you thought it would, and there you stood in your jeans among suits and dresses. Or maybe there was a day you nearly froze to death because it started balmy and you figured it wasn’t worth dragging a jacket around all day.

Of course it's important to be dressed right for social engagements and chilly temperatures. But if you're not, you'll survive.

You must be dressed properly for the day of salvation, when Jesus arrives. Because in this case, being dressed properly actually is a matter of life and death. The Word says: **put on the weapons of light and clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ**. It's probably best to think about that second phrase first. How exactly does a person clothe himself with Jesus? How does a person wear her Savior?

It starts by believing in him. Paul writes in another one of his letters that everyone baptized into Christ is clothed with Christ. In Revelation, St. John sees the saints in heaven – believers in Jesus – clothed in his righteousness. When a person believes in Jesus, the filth of their sin is washed away by the Savior's blood, and Jesus' perfection is draped over his shoulders.

To be dressed properly for the day of salvation, trust in Jesus. You will be clothed in his righteousness when the day arrives. You say, "Got it. I do believe in Jesus. I'm properly dressed. I'm ready for the day." Excellent! So did the Christians in Rome to whom Paul wrote this letter. Yet he gives them this reminder anyway, even though they already believe. Why? Because they were living in a dark world that was bent on destroying their saving faith in Jesus.

And so are we. Paul mentions some of the world's dark and faith-destroying works: **carousing and drunkenness, sexual sin and wild living, strife and jealousy**. These are examples of dark deeds; it's not an exhaustive list. Any action, attitude, or speech that violates God's commands is darkness.

That means people clothed in Christ, ready for the day of salvation, will look closely at their lives. We examine our attitudes carefully and compare them to God's will. We look at our speech and our actions and line them up against God's commands. We ask ourselves: Where has it become rather easy for me to sin? Where have I been listening to dark, godless ideas?

Scripture says very plainly that those who trust in Jesus – all those clothed in his righteousness through faith – will live in that righteousness. There is a direct connection between what a person believes and what she does and says and thinks. On this side of heaven, we will never be perfect, of course, But we will consistently live in the light of God's commands, not the darkness of our world.

Every Christian must do this diligently, because we all have particular darkness that we struggle with more than others. And we all have different social circles with people who might make us feel that certain sins are harmless and normal. For example, the first two congregations I served – one as a vicar, the other as a pastor – were both in Wisconsin. In Wisconsin, it's considered very normal to get blindingly drunk on a regular basis. In fact, you're weird if you don't. It always blew my mind how comfortable Christians were openly discussing (even bragging about) their drunken escapades. Imagine sitting at a table waiting for a church council meeting to start, listening to the Chairman of the Board of Education and the Chairman of the Board of Elders go on and on about it, yucking it up! Right in front of the vicar, like there was nothing wrong with it. That darkness had just become normal to them.

Well, that particular sin is on St. Paul's list. Maybe yours isn't. But we need to be careful. Everything against God's will is darkness. We are called to walk in the light, to live the righteousness of our Savior that we wear.

You see, Satan also understands that there is direct link between what is believed and what is lived. So if he can get a believer in Jesus to live in a dark deed, then sooner or later his faith will go dark. This is why Paul so fervently encourages people who are Christians – already dressed in Jesus’ holiness by faith – to live it out.

You’re ready. You believe in Jesus. You’re dressed in him. Wonderful. Stay that way. Stay out of the darkness and walk in the light, the law of the Lord.

St. Paul tells us how to do it. Again, he’s writing to people who already believe in Jesus. Even so, he commands them: **Clothe yourselves** and **put on**. Would you tell someone who’s already wearing a jacket to put one on? Probably not. Why would you tell people already clothed in Christ to be clothed in him?

The Holy Spirit is calling us to renew our faith. In baptism the Spirit dressed me in Jesus by bringing me to faith. When I remember that and meditate on it, I put on Christ again. When you receive his body and blood, his righteousness is draped over you again. In this season of Advent, we look forward to both of Christ’s arrivals. We prepare for the second coming, but also the first, when he won salvation. Our worship is built to turn us back to Jesus’ saving work over and over throughout the year.

We clothe ourselves in Christ again and again. Each time we are in his love, he is draped over us. And so each time we are in his love, he gives us more and more power to **walk decently, as in the daytime**.

It is power we need. Scripture uses words like “battle,” “war,” “struggle,” “strife,” and “conflict.” Even in these verses, Paul strikes a militaristic tone. When he tells us to put away deeds of darkness, he tells us in the same breath: **put on the weapons of light**.

There was a kid named Caden. His mother wanted him to stay warm in the wintertime. It never got too cold where they lived, but she was very determined that he would not get cold. So, she made this special wintertime outfit. And it was amazing because it was all one piece. The snow pants connected directly to the boots; the scarf was sewed around the neck of the coat, which was strapped to the snowpants. The super-thick mittens were also attached directly to the coat’s sleeves. And of course, the coat had a hood with a facemask also attached. If you can picture the little brother Randy in that movie, “A Christmas Story,” Caden was more bundled than that! And it was this remarkable single connected piece of clothing, so he’d be unable to avoid wearing any of it.

When you clothe yourself in Christ, you are dressed in more than righteousness. God is also arming you. Together with Jesus’ perfection, he is equipping you every weapon you need to fight off darkness and walk in the light. It comes all in one connected piece. You wear it all: Jesus’ righteousness and the weapons of light.

The weapons of light are truths that God tells us in his Word. God’s truth is light, and lethal to the forces of darkness. Use God’s truth to fight back. When temptation tells you, “You are too weak to resist. You have no choice,” fight back with the truth: “You are only half-right. I am too weak. But Jesus is not. He crushed Satan’s head and conquered all sin. I am his and he is mine. In him, I am strong enough to overcome any temptation. No one and nothing – not the devil, not my own sinful nature, not the unbelieving forces of the world, are stronger than Jesus.”

When temptation tells you, "It's no big deal. Everyone does it. It's just one sin," fight back with weapons of light. Fight back with God's truth: "Sin is always serious. It is serious enough to God that he required his Son's own blood to pay for it. Away from me with this dark stupidity about it not mattering."

When temptation says, "It will be fun. Live a little," fight back with weapons of light. Fight back with God's truth: "My loving Lord has filled the world with a million ways to have fun that do not involve walking in darkness. I will find one of them. Because the goal of this temptation is not help me live a little. The goal is to rip me away from my loving Lord, and make me die a lot."

For every temptation to walk in darkness, the light of God's truth gives you the weapons to fight back and win. When he clothed you with Christ, he clothed you with those weapons of light at the same time. You've got them. Use them to defeat the darkness and walk in the light.

By God's grace, we are clothed in Christ's righteousness and ready for the day of his salvation. Along with his robe of righteousness God also arms us with his truth. Be clothed in Christ every day, and use the weapons of light God gives you in his Word. Dress for the day of salvation, and walk in the light until it arrives. Amen.