

Ad Te Levavi (1st Sunday in Advent): November 27, 2022

“Wake Up”

Grace, Mercy and Peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text this morning is our Epistle lesson, especially these words, “**Romans 13:11.**”

This is a timely Epistle to read on the heels of Thanksgiving. It is now, when many preparations to celebrate Christmas kick into high gear. No longer can one slumber in putting up the tree, bake the cookies, or make the travel plans. It will be here sooner than we often plan, so get up and get going.

Paul of course is not talking about rising from sleep to decorate your Christmas tree. The sleep here isn’t even death. Paul is speaking of living the Christian life. This is often not an easy thing, is it?

Have you ever tried anything really difficult? Like trying to fall asleep, or trying to wake up in the morning. Sleep is important, and yet; how often do we fill our days and nights with so many things that we lose sight of that basic function of the human body that is needed to stay mentally and physically healthy? Ponder with me for a moment, just how true and closely related physical and spiritual sleep are—when you sleep in the natural sense, such as in your bed at night, you do not see or perceive any of the things that are here on earth. You lay prostrate like a dead man, and pay no attention to anything, all the while involved with utterly useless images and forms, dreams and visions, instead of real things. When you awake, the dreams and images vanish; sometimes the feelings or a few images linger for a bit; but the images are no longer as vivid and reality takes over.

This is the same for the spiritual state. When you live in ungodliness, you are sleeping and dead in the sight of God, you do not see or perceive the spiritual goods offered by the Gospel. Meanwhile, you are involved in the temporal, perishable good of this world, and occupied with worldly desires and delights, which are no more like eternal joy than dreamed images are like natural, living creatures. When you wake up, either by faith or by dying, you see and recognize that what you loved here on earth is fleeting.

The spiritual man, the one who is in Christ, lifts up to God, “***We do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.***”¹

Romans 13 lays out the only genuine motivation for Christian holiness. The task of actually being holy is beyond your abilities - your holiness is from God. But the holiness which adorns your conduct is a cooperative endeavor. God gives you the power, and guides you in the doing - even gives to you the will to do it, but the actual doing of it is yours. As long as you still have the sinful flesh clinging to you in this life, it will be under constant attack, and so you still are in need of the proper motivation to enable you to do anything at all and to endure the terrible lure to do that which is sinful - and our text tells us that motivation; keep in mind that the night is almost gone.

Before I talk about that holiness, however, I need to make one thing clear: Jesus Christ is your holiness. What this text talks about is your conduct by which you confess Christ and show forth His glory, and live as His children, but your true holiness is Jesus Christ. He pours your forgiveness and gives you His holiness. That is a part of the Gospel. You are holy in Christ by imputation - He counts you righteous with His righteousness. In and of ourselves, even the good things we do are corrupted with sin and unholy aside from Christ's cleansing and gift of righteousness. With that truth in mind, we continue with the text.

Continuing with the theme of the Last Sundays of the Church year, the Advent texts also carry a sense of urgency. Unlike the end of the church year, instead of a woeful theme of judgment, Advent speaks of Christ's coming with joyful anticipation. Paul is pressing the importance of the holiness of the Christian's conduct on the basis of the realization that its almost over. The time of this world is almost done. Jesus is coming back any time now. Whatever is going to be done needs to be done now and we need to have a sense of urgency about it. It is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep! The night of sin and darkness is almost gone, and the day of salvation and life eternal is at hand. You can see the sky brightening in the east already. Wake up. The alarm clock is ringing, and there is no time to hit the snooze button.

¹ 2 Corinthians 4:16–18

Living for this world and in the values and attitudes of the world around us is the sleep from which we need to awaken. The hard part of the instructions Paul gives us is **making no provision for the flesh in regards to its lusts**. To do otherwise is to be asleep. Paul described such a man in First Corinthians, and delivered him to Satan for the destruction of his body in order to rescue his soul. What that means, precisely, is debated, but obviously this was a man who needed to wake up! He who dies with the most toys does not win - he just dies. Life is not about accumulating possessions, or having a good time, or even watching your grandchildren grow. Those things may be part of life, but your life is about Christ, the hope of salvation, and rescuing the lost and confused around us. It is doing no wrong to a neighbor. It is not lying prostrate, it is up and moving.

Paul gets pretty specific. Life is not about partying. That is what **carousing and drunkenness** refer to. God wants us to enjoy life, but all things in moderation. There are six things listed by Paul – jealousy pertains to the heart and mind, quarreling pertains to words; orgies, drunkenness, sexual immorality and sensuality pertain to works of the body. The wholeness of being, the entire person, is directed here at living in the light of Christ. When the spiritual man is sleeping, the body rages on. Excess of food and drink lead to all kinds of immorality. When the belly gets full of food and drink, comfort often allows the mind and mouth to fill with useless words, sometimes with hurt, anger, and spite; much like a pilot who has lost his rudder. Quarreling, jealousy, anger and hatred manifest themselves, as clear as day, in efforts to destroy the modicum of peace and harmony at any family table.

Think carefully about these words Paul uses. Life is not about taking the most pleasure out of it that you can. That is what words about **sexual promiscuity and sensuality** are about. Promiscuity distorts life and makes it all about one particular pleasure, and misses or deliberately rejects God's plan for our happiness and well-being in life. Sensuality, on the other hand, simply lives for the pleasure and delightful, sensual experiences of it. The life of a Christian is not about how it feels.

Our lives are not about who is first or who is greater - **strife and jealousy** arise out of such a misunderstanding of the purpose of life. In fact, **strife and jealousy** in the church always demonstrates that we have forgotten who is first and who is greatest - Jesus. These mistaken behaviors and focuses are the sorts of things that Paul refers to when he instructs us to **lay aside the deeds of darkness**.

Our alternate course is to **put on the armor of light**. That expression is used in parallel with the expression, **put on the Lord Jesus Christ**.

Our alternatives are to **sleep** in sin and **do the deeds of darkness** or **put on the Lord Jesus Christ** - which means faith and laying aside the sorts of evils that Paul has named.

You **put on Jesus** at your Baptism. When you were clothed with Christ's righteousness. Paul has already addressed this in Romans 6, "*We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*"² That means, when you live as though your sins are forgiven, when you walk as a child of light and as one who has eternal life as a certainty, and when your life reflects the conviction that God is your loving heavenly Father, you wake from sleep, the hour has come, salvation is nearer, and you wear the armor of light.

Putting on the Lord Jesus Christ means a change in you, and a change in how you relate to the world around you. The change in you is trust in the forgiveness which Christ won for you on the cross and a humble dependence on God. Such trust looks back on sin with repentance and the joy of forgiveness — and it looks forward on sin as something alien and deadly and earnestly to be avoided. The change in your relationship to the world - or how you relate to it - is that you see the world for what it is.

The world is passing away. It is temporary. It is not worth your time and devotion. This life, and the pleasures of it, are not the focus of the life of a child of God in Jesus Christ. This is not to say that we ignore taking care of the environment, or we deliberately turn away from others in need. We serve the good of the people around us out of love - but the world does not determine our lives - the love of God for us does. We cannot panic because someone thinks that the world is falling apart. God is in control, and although things can look grim at times, and real problems arise around us, we know that God, who loves us and will always care for us, is in control. We children of God never need to fear what is coming upon the earth. Our Father can handle it, and will handle it for our sakes.

So, in everything we do, we live out our faith. We may well work at preserving the world around us - but we do it as an act of faith - not as though we are desperate and frightened about what would happen if we did not, but as those who are taking care of our fellow

² Romans 6:4

men and women out of the same sort of love for them that God has shown to us. We serve our fellow men from a heart of compassion, as God has had compassion on us, and as those whom God has abundantly blessed so that we can be a blessing to others. Whatever we do, **we do it to the glory of God**, not because we expect that without our help, God will not also bless them. All that we do is done as an expression of our faith and a confession of Christ.

The task of confessing Christ and sharing God's grace and salvation is all the more urgent today because we know that the time is short. The words of Paul, inspired by God, are all the more meaningful today. If **salvation was nearer** when Paul wrote to the Romans **than when they first believed** - imagine how much closer it is today, two thousand years later! Of course, the hour is late personally - we never know how much time we have to do what God has given us to do. Each of us knows just how short life is, and how quickly even forty or fifty years can slip by. But the time left for the entire world has even grown short. The last day is two thousand years closer - and we started the very last days on Good Friday, when Jesus died for our sins. On Easter Sunday, when Jesus rose for our justification and showed us what He had in store for those who are in Christ Jesus, the end of this world had begun.

We know what it is that God has given us to do. Our twin tasks are to speak and live with our brothers and sisters to bring all under the story of God's grace. This means bringing the gospel to others who do not know it yet, and taking care of one another in the faith; neither part has priority over the other - nor, can either part can be ignored due to some misplaced preference for one over the other. Our lives, our times, and our riches are about the Gospel - telling it to those around us outside of the church, and encouraging our brothers and sisters in the household of God who are inside the church to stand firm, remain faithful, and hold fast to the hope which is ours in Jesus Christ. It is His story. He is our father and head of the household. We live under Him in His kingdom.

Our hope is resurrection from the grave and life eternal beyond sin and death, beyond sorrow and sickness. This isn't the idle, wishful thinking kind of hope. This is the hope guaranteed to us by the death of Jesus on the cross in our place, and certified by the resurrection of Jesus from the grave on Easter morning.

This isn't a weak hope, but the certainty of that which is yet to be experienced in its fullness. Your sins are forgiven, and you are the chosen of God Himself - beloved and precious to Him, and you experience the foretaste of that hope each Sunday in the Lord's Supper, and in the holy absolution, and even in the hearing of God's Word in our lessons and in the sermons. God is saying, it is going to be like this, only fuller, and richer, and better! Wake up. He's coming. Get ready.

It may seem like life is going on just like it always has. It might seem at times like the urgency of the work of the people of God is not really all that urgent; but, you know better. The Day is nearer now than when we first believed. Jesus told us that it would seem like this. Paul, writing in First Thessalonians, wrote, ***“Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”***³

Christmas is coming. Jesus is coming again. Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. It is washed over you in water. It is in your hearing of His Word. It is in your mouth in His body and blood. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

³ 1 Thessalonians 5:1–9

Prayer of the Church
First Sunday in Advent (Ad Te Levavi)
27 November 2022

To You, O Lord, we lift up our souls and in You we put our trust. Do not let us be ashamed of our hope but come quickly. Sustain us by Your Holy Spirit, that we may have joy at the advent of Christ, our Savior. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious Father, You have made us glad to enter into Your presence to hear the good news of our Savior and receive Your gifts. Preserve Your Church against all her enemies, and lead us to walk in Your ways and to follow Your paths, that when Jesus returns in His glory we may welcome Him with glad hosannas. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of love, visit our homes and defend us from the temptation to walk in the works of darkness, that husbands and wives may love one another and raise their children in the faith. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, behold our nation and its leaders and protect our armed forces, taking them under Your care and blessing. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *Elsie, Cheryl, Keith, Kevin, and Zach* grant that by Your Word and Spirit they may faithfully keep the covenant into which they have been called, boldly confess their Savior, and finally share with all Your saints the joys of eternal life; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Oliver, Tina, Jenna, and Alivia* celebrate their birthdays. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Show compassion to the sick, the suffering and those in need *especially Marvin, Ruth, Zoey, Laurel, Wanda, Duane, Greg, Pastor Jerry Doelinger, Jill, Pastor Small (St. Silas, North Liberty) and those we name in our hearts.* Relieve their pain, increase their faith, and grant healing and peace in accordance with Your wisdom and will. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, Your Son humbly rode into Jerusalem to the shouts of “Hosanna!” so that He might give us righteousness and salvation by His death and resurrection. Mercifully grant that we would repent of our sins and rejoice in His presence as He visits us with His body and blood in His Holy Supper this day. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy God, You declared that the days were coming when You would accomplish our salvation, and in Your time You caused Your Son, the righteous Branch, to spring up for David. By Your grace, keep us joined as branches to Christ, that we might bear fruit until the day He returns in glory; for He lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**