

Sermon: Clothed in light  
1 Advent, Year A  
Romans 13:11-14

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December 1, 2019

The days are getting shorter. Here in this northern hemisphere, most of us are keenly aware of the increasingly long nights, the darkness covering us for extensive stretches. And just as the darkness of creation envelops us, we hear a call from scripture to be bearers of light. Both in our reading from Romans as well as in our collect, from which we can assume its inspiration has been drawn, we hear an exhortation, “give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light.”

The Apostle Paul tells us it’s wake up time! Now is the time to awaken from the sleep that draws us from the love of God and loving ourselves and one another. Paul gives us some lively examples of darkness: drunkenness, debauchery, licentiousness, quarreling, and jealousy. We may be tempted to hide behind the fact that we aren’t even quite sure what some of these words mean! But the spiritual darkness that Paul is referring to can come in many forms that go beyond the ones he lists. Darkness can include selfishness, lack of forgiveness, despair, and willful ignorance.

While clearly pointing out the reality of spiritual darkness, Paul is exhorting us to live in light. The listener is being called to shed the old clothes, the old ways of living, the old ways of even thinking, to put on the new clothes of Christ, to live into the new reality of Christ’s healing love. This is the world we belong to as followers of Christ. God’s love is a deeper reality than what our culture so often presents to us.

Today is the first day of the season of Advent, the beginning of a new liturgical year. Each Sunday in Advent we will be doing something during the sermon time that is a little different than our norm. Normally our sermons are about 10-12 minutes in length. During Advent the plan is for me to preach with words for about 5-6 minutes and to then allow 5 minutes of silence for quiet contemplation. I will give you something to prayerfully consider. I realize for many of us this time of silence is a joy and for the rest of us it can be quite difficult. What I am aiming to do is to open up some space within our liturgy for you. Typically we use a lot of words in our liturgy; they are often beautiful and rich in meaning. However, for some of us, the service goes by so quickly, we struggle to let those words sink in.

For some this silence may be a welcome refuge, for others it may seem like a waste of time in a season when time seems an especially precious commodity. When we have Christmas shopping to do, trees to buy and decorate, gifts to share, cookies to bake, in addition to our regular duties, do we really have time to sit in silence for 5 minutes? Can we afford this luxury? I would say that in this busy season, we can’t afford *not* to take time not just sit with God, let ourselves be loved, let ourselves be forgiven, let ourselves become more fully human. In a season where life can often feel rushed, this is an opportunity to slow down and go deeper with God.

God speaks to us all the time. Yes, God is speaking to you and to me. Can we open our eyes, wake up from our spiritual sleep, pay attention so we can hear God? Where do you find darkness in your own life today? Perhaps in a politically divided nation? Have the impeachment

hearings or other news brought you angst or despair? Perhaps your darkness is to be found in a more personal situation – maybe in grief or loneliness, in depression or lack of financial resources? Maybe it is in broken relationships or in a failure to forgive yourself or others. Maybe your darkness is in some way you have alienated yourself from God, chosen the darkness of willful ignorance rather than choosing to see the brilliant light and love of God.

What does it mean for YOU to be clothed in the light of Christ? Wherever you experience spiritual darkness, can you take these 5 minutes to imagine Christ's light permeating that darkness, transforming you as Christ transforms the situation? How can you slough off the old life and awaken to a new way of seeing, the seeing that welcomes in Christ's light to all situations. This is our call during Advent, to cast away the works of darkness, to put on the clothes of light, to watch for Christ's light, to be open to it, to be transformed by it. Amen.