

Romans 13:11-14

November 27 & 28, 2016; Advent 1

"Ready or not, here I come!" How many of you have played the game Hide and Seek? It is a really simple game. One person closes or covers their eyes. While he begins to countdown, everyone else runs off and hides. When you get to *ready or not, here I come,*" the game begins. No more running. No more time to hide. The one who is *"it"* is coming to find you.

As we begin this new season of Advent looking forward to our Savior's birth at Christmas, we ask the question: *"Are you ready?, because ready or not, he is coming!"* The Apostle Paul most likely did not start the congregation at Rome. However, he desperately wanted to get there. For a variety of reasons, he just couldn't get there. So, he did the next best thing that he could. He wrote the church at Rome a letter; the book of "Romans." The book of Romans is this beautiful instruction manual to the believers in Rome. He clearly lays out both law and gospel. He teaches them a variety of ways that they could live their Christian faith in all kinds of different situations. Why did Paul care? **"And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed."** Even if Paul couldn't get there, he wanted them to be sure that they were ready for Jesus' coming.

They didn't need to be ready for Jesus to come to that manger in Bethlehem. His first coming to this world had already happened. He had already paid for the sins of the world on the cross. Jesus had already ascended back into heaven. These believers in Rome knew the story of Jesus well. Paul wanted them to be completely ready for the 2nd return of Jesus on the last day. He didn't want them to be falling asleep, **"because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed."**

There are some days that it is harder to get up than others. There are those cold winter mornings when it is so comfortable in the warm covers over you. It is so easy to just hit that snooze button once, maybe twice, maybe three times. That magical button that gives us the option of getting up now or getting a few extra minutes of sleep. Even though we know we have to get up, we like being comfortable in bed. It is so easy for Satan to get us to be comfortable in sin. It is so easy to not show God's love to those around us. In the verses just before our text, Paul writes: **"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law (for all these commandments can be) summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."**

Paul doesn't want us to fall asleep in our sins. He doesn't want us to think that we don't need to show love to those around us, because his return is so far away. Paul wants us to understand that every day of our life, brings us one day closer to the end of our life or the end of this world. There will be a day when there is no more time. To see an illustration of that, look at our Gospel lesson for today. For 120 years, Noah was telling the people that there was a flood coming. They saw him building a boat a 1 ½ times the length of a football field (450 ft.). But then the Day of Judgment came. The people of Noah's day had run out of time. God sealed the Ark, and the floodwaters rose. Out of all the people in the world by the time of Noah, only eight people were awake. Think of how many millions of people were surprised when the deluge hit. They ignored the warnings and signs. God carried out his judgment.

We don't know when that time will run out for us. Maybe it will run out before this sermon ends. Maybe before Christmas it will end. Maybe in 2017. Maybe it will end in another thousand years. After all, the Apostle Paul told us 2000 years ago that **"our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed."** It is time to wake up. It's time to be ready for his coming again. For when that day comes, you can't say, *"Give me a minute Jesus..."* You don't have time to brush your teeth. You don't have time to put a new suit or new dress on. You can't go to the next athletic event. You can't get your house in order. When Jesus comes, that's it. **"That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."** (Mt. 24:39-42)

So, how can we be ready? Paul says: **“Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”** Instead of the grubby old clothes stained by the guilt of sin, Jesus gives us new clothes. That’s what Jesus has done for us on the cross. Every deed of darkness, every sinful thought or desire, he took to the cross on his back. He bore them so that we don’t have to.

The clothes he puts on us, changes us. Think about how we act when we wear different clothes. If I have those old ugly, beat up, clothes on, I don’t really care what happens to them. But if I put on a suit, I may act in a whole different way. The clothes that Jesus puts on us, changes everything. He has taken our sinful heart that doesn’t want to follow God and changed it. It’s time for us to get dressed and live our Christian faith in every word and action we do.

Would people say that of you after you are gone? Would they say that they remember the Christ-like character of you? How would they describe you? If I asked you to name five persons who have **"put on Christ"** and through whom God has touched you, I'm sure that you could point to a parent, an aunt, a grandfather, a teacher. In the same way, as we share the love of Jesus by our words and actions, God can shine through us.

Ready or not, here I come. May we always keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. It’s time for us to wake up and not let Satan put our faith to sleep. It’s time to get dressed with Christ and let our faith shine. May God help each of us to continue to do that. May he keep each of us dressed with Christ's righteousness which he has placed on us. In Jesus’ name we ask it. Amen.

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