

## **Romans 13:11-14** - “Put On The Lord Jesus Christ”

Pr. Kurt A. VanFossan - Advent 1A 2022

Happy Advent! Since today is the first Sunday of Advent, that means Christmas is near—just around the corner! For most of us, if not all of us here today, that’s good news in more ways than one. Not only is this Advent/Christmas season a time of feasting with family and friends, and a time of giving and receiving gifts, it’s especially the time when we are reminded of the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. He is the reason we can rejoice even in the midst of troubles in our lives, in our families, and in the world in general.

Of course it’s not only Jesus’ birth that makes such joy in the midst of troubles possible, it’s mainly His death and resurrection. And that’s why our Gospel reading for today draws our attention to Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of Holy Week. During that Holy Week He would suffer and die on a cross in order to pay for our sins that cause us so much trouble, thus setting us free from our sins, and all our troubles, especially death. He would then rise to life again on the third day to assure us that all this is really true—our salvation is complete! Therefore, heaven is just around the corner, where we will continue our good times of feasting with family and friends and enjoying all God’s blessings.

So, why does our Epistle reading from Romans seem to put a damper on our celebrations? First, God, through St. Paul, points out that *“salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.”* He’s not denying that our salvation is complete in Christ, instead He’s referring to the Last Day of this world when Jesus will visibly return to this sinful world for the last time. We look forward to that day, since it will be the day when we who are feasting with the Lord today will continue to enjoy the Lord’s gifts in all their fullness. Unfortunately, for those who reject Jesus Christ and His invitation to the feast, the Last Day will mean that their opportunity to be saved will be over. For those who reject Christ it will not be a day of salvation or second chances, but a day of judgement and condemnation.

Our concern for those who reject Christ and His gift of salvation need not put a damper on our Advent/Christmas celebrations or our daily celebration of life in Christ. Instead, let our concern for others remind us that our celebrations and feasting are not only for our good but also for the good of those around us, to lead them to the same feast of salvation that God has made possible for all people.

So, don’t stop celebrating or enjoying the good things that God gives us in this life (especially His Word and Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper), but remember that we as God’s people are in this world for a purpose. That purpose is to let people know the reason for our celebrations. And one of the things that we need to be continually reminded of when it comes to letting people know the reason for our celebrations as Christians, is that we all need a lot of help understanding the things of God. Let’s face it, because of our sinful nature, our minds even as Christians are often focused on the wrong things. That makes God’s Word, which is always focuses on the right things, difficult to understand.

Take verse 14 of our Epistle reading for example. God tells us to *“put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”* I can see how people could easily think that God is telling us here that it’s wrong to enjoy any physical pleasures in this life. But with a little more explaining from God’s Word, and with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, it’s easy to see that that’s not what God is saying at all.

If you look at the previous two verses, where God says, *“let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy,”* it’s obvious that *“the flesh”* in this context doesn’t refer to all material or physical things, but to all sinful things. God’s not saying to “make no provision for your **physical** desires,” but to “make no provision for your **sinful** desires.” Therefore, when it comes to things like alcohol for example, God’s not saying that it’s a sin to drink alcohol, but He is saying that it’s sinful to drink too much, or to get *“drunk”* (Ephesians 5:18). When it comes to sex, God’s not saying that we must all be celebrate, but He is saying that outside of it’s intended purpose in marriage, it’s a sin (Hebrews 13:4).

So, God is saying that during this day of salvation in which we now live, while there is still time for unbelievers to be saved, don’t get caught up in the ways of this sinful world which abuse God’s blessings. For when we, as believers in Christ follow the ways of the world instead of following the Word of God, we lead people away from Christ instead of to Him.

Therefore, it’s okay to enjoy the physical blessings that God gives us, but be careful not to abuse them. And don’t forget to come to church to let the world know that your are righteous and they are not.

Is that why we’re here today? I hope not! But that’s what many in this world think, causing some to stay away because they think they’re not good enough to to come to church. Others stay away because they think that the church is full of hypocrites. So, as I said earlier, we all need a lot of help understanding. And that understanding comes from God’s Word, especially as it’s revealed in Jesus Christ.

That’s why God says to *“put on the Lord Jesus Christ.”* And **that’s** why we come here today, not because we’ve been completely successful in casting off the works of darkness; or in not getting caught up in the sinful ways of the world which delights in satisfying our sinful nature. Instead, we’re here today because we’re sinners in need of the forgiveness that is available to us through Jesus Christ. We’re here because we know that God loves us despite our sins, and that He was, therefore, born on that first Christmas day so that He could eventually go to Jerusalem to give His life as a sacrifice for our sins. We also know that He rose from the dead and continues to come to us today through His Word and Sacraments to give and strengthen in us our faith in Him and His Word which enables us to repent of our sins and rejoice in the Good News of His forgiveness.

It’s this Good News that we come to celebrate, and that we want to share with all people. Our King and Savior has come, and He’s here today to bless us with His forgiveness and love—to clothe us in **His** righteousness.

All glory be to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Children’s Sermon] In the Bible God tells us what’s good and bad. He also tells us that when we do something bad it’s like putting this black sheet over our heads. We are cut off from God, and lost.

So who did God send to save us sinful, lost people? Jesus. Jesus was born so that He could die on the cross to get rid of our sins. Then He rose from the dead to give us faith in Jesus as our Savior through baptism and/or through the Good News about Jesus’ birth, life, death and resurrection. When God gives us faith in Jesus as our Savior, it’s like putting this sheepskin over our heads, reminding us that we are covered with Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. God makes us little lambs of God who follow Jesus our Good Shepherd, and lead others to do the same.