

“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ”

Romans 13:8-14

First Sunday in Advent + November 27, 2022

Dear Friends in Christ,

As we begin a new Church Year we are also reminded that the new calendar year is only a month away. Lord willing, we will soon mark the year of our Lord two thousand twenty-three. Time keeps marching on! “For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed” (v.11). The Scriptures remind us that even as the years count *up* from the time of Christ’s first coming, they are counting *down* toward His second coming. God has a calendar that by our reckoning is counting backwards. He is counting down the days and the months and the years until that moment when Christ returns to judge the living and the dead. No one knows the day or the hour; “Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Matthew 24:44). We don’t know what year it will be when Jesus returns, but we do know He will return. We know that He is the boss; all people of all nations will stand before Him as judge. So, how does one get ready?

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The first thing is to lay aside the works of darkness. “The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness” (v.12). When you get up in the morning you take off your pajamas or whatever clothes you slept in and put on your new clothes for the day. You wouldn’t go to work in your underwear or just put on a T-shirt and gym shorts for a wedding. So also, because we are no longer in the darkness of unbelief, we are to repent of our sinful ways. To repent of them means to turn away from them. We want to be rid of them. We put them off daily, like we put off our dirty clothes and put on clean clothes. After all, we want to be ready to meet the King of Kings!

What are the works of darkness that we are to take off? He specifically mentions three pairs of sins: “let us walk...not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy” (v.13).

We know what drunkenness is; what are orgies? That would be a whole bunch of people drunk and cutting loose to do all sorts of things that they would

never do when sober. It is excessive feasting, unrestrained revelry, taking a good thing too far until people are out of control. Among the gifts of God the Creator listed in Psalm 104 is “wine to gladden the heart of man” (v.15). Jesus Himself turned water into wine for a marriage celebration. A Christian who has reached legal age may enjoy a drink or two from time to time. But each Christian needs to know when enough is enough, and to be able to exercise self-control and to say “no” before he or she loses control. We would have to say the same about food. It is fitting at times to feast and celebrate, but to eat too much too often is harmful to the bodies that God gave us. (Something to think about around the holidays!) God calls us at all times to be sober and vigilant, not only so that we are not a danger to others, but also so that we are alert and ready to meet the temptations of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh, which wish to use such moments of weakness to lure us away from Jesus our Savior.

We can be sure that it is the Lord’s will that His people will live in such a way that neither alcohol nor any other substance, legal or illegal, will impair our thinking and acting. Love for our neighbor dictates that, especially when we are operating a motor vehicle on the public roadways. Verses 8-10 of the text remind us: “Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,’ and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (vv.8-10).

And then we come to that phrase that we are not to walk “in sexual immorality and sensuality” (v.13). The word “immorality” has the word “moral” in it. When something is “moral” it is in line with the law—not just the laws of the state of Illinois, but the laws of God. If something is “immoral” it is outside what is acceptable to the law of God. Years ago our parents would warn us about people who didn’t have good morals. You just don’t hear that sort of thing anymore. Does anyone still talk about “morals” or how to lead a “moral” life? Is there still anyone who cares what God in heaven has to say about a particular deed? The modern thinking is that behind closed doors two

consenting adults may do whatever they wish, as long as they do not knowingly hurt a third party. They are in charge of their own lives, right? It is just the two of them, right? If the state of Illinois says it is okay, it must be moral, right? No, God the Creator has a higher standard. And, by the way, there are never two people alone in a room away from His knowledge. Nothing is hidden from Him before whom we will all have to give an account. Neither is it permissible to go online and watch videos that fill your head with lustful images. No, God has a different standard: the benefits of marriage are reserved for one man and one woman joined in holy matrimony. Anything else is sin, an example of the “immorality” that is mentioned here. Those who are committing these acts should not be affirmed or celebrated for their immoral deeds. Instead, with humility and gentleness, they should be called to repentance. And, those who are self-righteous and proud and think “I could never do that something like that” must also repent—daily.

Finally he mentions “quarreling and jealousy” (v.13). How this hounds us today! Instead of reasonably talking through problems and disagreements, the discussion often it sinks into strife, discord, and contention. If an argument cannot be won with persuasion, too often one side or the other resorts to personal attacks and name-calling. I heard an interview with a modern historian recently. She has studied the various civil wars that have erupted around the world since World War II. There have been over 200! The striking thing is that there have been more civil wars since the advent of social media. People post things online and they receive back messages that confirm them in their hatred of the other group. Instead of reaching across the lines of division, modern technology just makes them worse. Often the root of these conflicts is jealousy: we can’t stand to watch the other side come out on top. We have to find some way to take them down and notch or two because we want to come out on top.

All these are just a few examples of the filthy night clothes that need to be taken off and discarded through daily repentance and faith. Indeed, he adds at the end of the section: “make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (v.14). Part of genuine repentance is to really turn away from these sins, and not to leave the provisions on hand that we have used to commit them. For

example, if you have a stash of pornography, get rid of it! (In New Minden there is garbage pickup tomorrow morning.) If you are truly repentant you will not at the same time be planning to use it again. Sin should never be embraced or excused or provided for. Sins are like monsters—the more you feed them the more they will grow and dominate. If you starve them they will gradually decrease and wither and be tamed more easily. In the power that God alone can give, we struggle and fight against these things every day. Each of us Christians should have a sober view of the particular traps to which we are most vulnerable. We daily grab a hold of Christ’s forgiveness and seek to flee from these works of darkness.

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That brings us to this wonderful little phrase in the text, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (v.14). What does that mean, to “wear” Jesus? Elsewhere the Apostle explains: “In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:26-27). To be baptized into Christ is nothing else than to be covered with Christ. That is a graphic way of saying that what Christ has done, the benefits that He earned, became ours when we were baptized. They remain ours as long as we have faith in Him. Christ fulfilled all righteousness for us. He did not fall into any of the traps that the devil set for Him. He did not lie or lust or get drunk or in any way fail to show the love of God to others. When the baptized person looks in faith at Christ, God does not see our failures and struggles. He sees Jesus. He sees perfection. It is like a guy carrying a new mattress. From a distance all you can see is the mattress and not the man. Even so God looks at us and sees Jesus. The Scriptures assure us that when we were baptized into Christ, we were baptized into His death, His burial, and His resurrection. “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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” (Romans 6:3-4). Christ’s death answered for all our sins and failures. By shedding His blood for us on the cross and suffering the abandonment of hell He has purchased for us forgiveness of sins and eternal life. His resurrection proves that this forgiveness

and eternal life is freely available to all who believe. What is more, the same power of God that raised Christ from the dead is at work in us who believe so that we may daily leave behind the dirty works of our sinful nature and instead walk in the ways of the Lord. Isaiah, the ancient Gospel poet, put it this way: “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels” (Isaiah 61:10).

The text puts it another way: “So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light” (v.12). As long as we are in this world we are in warfare. But the Christ whom we have put on in Baptism enables us to gain the victory one day at a time. And when we slip and fall, Christ is there to forgive us and receive us once again. The armor of light includes the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Ephesians 6:17). By daily hearing the word of God, the Holy Spirit Himself works a renewing of our mind and heart.

Dear Friends, we do not know when Christ will return. May God help us daily to turn away from our sins and daily “put on” the Lord Jesus Christ in true faith.

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