

INI

Romans 13,11-14

Advent 1 — 27 November 2016

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the first lesson from Saint Paul's Letter to the Roamns, which was read earlier:

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

So far the reading. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction: Times change and so do standards of dress. We live in an age which in our coountry has become much more informal.

When I was young and growing up in Pittsburgh, PA, I remember when my mother would take my sister and I downtown to shop. We would get dressed up. A coat and tie for me and a dress for my sister, and we both wore leather shoes. Today, things are much, much more informal.

I remember a time when going on an airplane was like going downtown. Men wore suits and women wore dresses. Real meals were served and the cutlery was stainless steel in coach and silver in first class. That was a time before airport security and taking off your shoes. Today's airline traveler dresses much more informally, and not only for security reasons.

What if you received a real invitation to a state dinner at the White

House? Informal wear would be out of the question. Women might well go out to buy a new designer dress for the occasion. Men might rent a tux and patent leather shoes. You'd want to be dressed just right for the occasion.

Today's Epistle lesson asks us a question: What is the proper attire for meeting Jesus? I'm not speaking about dressing for church — and neither is Paul. What the Epistle lesson is speaking about is what to wear when Jesus comes again in glory. You might well ask, "Well, pastor, exactly when will that be? I'd like to get ready!" This brings me to this morning's sermon topic: "**Getting Dressed To Meet Jesus.**" I'll develop this topic in three parts:

- 1) When to Get Dressed;**
- 2) What Not To Wear;** and,
- 3) Where To Get The Proper Clothes.**

1) When to Get Dressed. If you receive an invitation to a state dinner at the White House, the date and time will be clearly stated. You'll know how much time you'll have to prepare, and thus plan accordingly.

What does Paul say about how much time we have to prepare to meet Jesus? He says:

... it is already the hour for you to wake up from sleep ... the night is gone and the day is at hand.

For people such as ourselves, who all too readily look at our watches to see when we have to be at a certain place for an appointment, Paul's answer seems to be less than satisfactory. But is it?

We know that on December 24th or 25th we'll be meeting Jesus in spirit at the manger in Bethlehem at our Christmas worship. But is that what Paul is talking about? Getting ready for the celebration of Jesus'

birth?

Unfortunately, for many people that is their once-a-year pilgrimage, so to speak, to meet Jesus — O.K., Easter might be the other, but let's face it, Christmas is a much bigger holiday than Easter.

Paul really isn't speaking about Christmas. He's speaking about Jesus coming again in glory — summed up in that phrase in the Creed, “to judge the quick and the dead.”

Even in Paul's day, however, there were people who scoffed at this whole notion of Jesus' coming. Paul's contemporary, Peter, ran into this attitude and the mockers who expressed it. Peter summed up the argument of the mockers, who said:

Where is the promise of His [that is, Jesus'] coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep [that is, they died] — all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation. (2 Peter 3,4)

We might say that there is a certain amount of truth in that statement. But it might help us to realize that God's time table is not our time table, for with the Lord “one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” There is a reason that Jesus has not yet returned.

Peter, continuing to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, goes on and says:

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3,9)

Our Lord came to Bethlehem, and in the spirit we prepare to meet Him there. If we are not prepared to meet Him there, on His terms, shall we be prepared to meet Him when He comes again in glory?

The date for preparing to meet Jesus is not December 24th, nor December 25th, but now, today. If we are prepared and properly clothed today, then we shall be prepared to meet Him not only at Christmas, but also when He comes again.

Paul, however, does give us fair warning, and tells us:

2) What Not To Wear. Paul says that we are to “lay aside the deeds of darkness.” If necessary, we are to change our clothes.

Of course, here Paul is speaking in images. He is not speaking about changing our informal attire for something more formal. He is not talking about children who play in the mud and then have to wash and change their clothes. He is not talking about the laborer who comes home after work covered in dust or grime and then has to wash and change.

Paul tells us what the clothes of darkness are:

carousing and drunkenness, ... sexual promiscuity and sensuality,
... strife and jealousy.

Paul is referring the kind of lives some are living. In effect, Paul is saying that the lives we live are the clothing we wear, it is the clothing by which others judge us.

For the ancient world as well as now, most people who indulge in this kind of behavior do so during the night, when they think that the cover of darkness will also cover their evil deeds. Perhaps they think that not only will others not see them, but that God will be unable to see them as well. But as David says of God:

Even the darkness is not dark to You,
And the night is as bright as the day.
Darkness and light are alike unto You. (Psalm 139,12)

God does not need night vision goggles in order to see what mankind does under the cover of darkness. God can see each one of us clearly, and it does not matter whether it is day or night.

But God's vision is even keener than this. He is the One who can read our hearts and know our inmost desires and thoughts. Thus, it does not matter whether our outward behavior seems to be O.K., God knows if we are inwardly consumed by rage, jealousy, impure thoughts, and the like.

But to the world, so much of this is not so much sin as it is the basis for TV sit-coms or movies, at which we can laugh at the antics of others. To the world, much of this sin is what we might describe as "victimless."

Society, however, pays a high price.

Many say that crime grows out of poverty. In a certain sense, this is true, but you have to amend the statement — more properly speaking, crime grows out of a poverty of values and poor choices. It is a poverty of hearts gone wrong.

To God, however, such behavior is a manifestation of a sin-encrusted heart, a heart separated from Him; and as Paul says, those who habitually do such things should not deceive themselves, for they will not inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.

An evil heart, evil thoughts, bad behavior — in God's scheme of things, all these things will be punished.

But Paul does not leave us in despair. He shows us:

3) Where To Get The Proper Clothes. Paul says:

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, to make no provision for the flesh

in regard to its lusts.

What does it mean, “to put on the Lord Jesus Christ”? How might putting on Jesus be like putting on new clothes, proper clothes with which to greet the Kings of kings?

I don't think that anyone with whom I am speaking today is engaging in the outward pursuits of the “works of the flesh,” that is, the old clothes that reflect our old, unforgiven Adam, who is at continual war with God.

But I dare say, that all of us at times battle inwardly. Who has not had a tinge of jealousy, strife, evil passion or thoughts which will not go away, at least go away easily?

I've used this example before. As many of you may know, we have a big, white dog. He sheds — at times, massively. So before church, as I stand in the bedroom with my black suit, I roll the lint brush over my suit. Now the illumination in the bedroom is provided by several 60 watt light bulbs. When I am done with the lint roller, I look and think to myself, “Well, that looks pretty good.” But when I step outside in the sun light, I see that what I thought was O.K. in dim light, is not quite as good in direct sun light. So it is when we are confronted by God's Word. All of a sudden, God's Law shows us that what we had previously thought might be O.K., is not.

It is only as Jesus comes to us in His Word and offers us His forgiveness that we can come to Him in repentance, clinging to that forgiveness in order to have our old, sin-stained clothing covered up.

Jesus took our old clothes, our sins, and died on the Cross in order that He might work a clothing exchange for us. On the third day He rose from the dead to show us that as the Light of World, His life and light could not be extinguished by the darkness of death or sin or the power of the devil.

When Paul says to “put on the armor of light,” Paul is speaking about the armor of God’s forgiveness in Christ. But where do we find this forgiveness?

It is there on the Cross, in Christ’s death for us and our sins, a death which Jesus shares with us in our Baptism.

Scripture says:

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.
(Galatians 3,27)

and again:

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? (Romans 6,3)

It is at the Cross and in the resurrection of Christ that God has declared us to be right in His sight. By ourselves, we are not right in God’s sight. But in Christ, we are right.

In Christ, God does not see our sin-stained clothing. Rather, God sees the righteousness of His Son. For when we repent of our sins and God forgives us for Jesus’ sake, Jesus covers us with His sin-free clothing. As the hymn declares:

Jesus Thy blood and righteousness,
My beauty are, my glorious dress. (TLH 371)

This glorious dress is renewed each and every time we seek forgiveness. God declared us forgiven in our Baptism. God declares it through His Word and also gives it to us, when in Holy Communion Jesus shares with us His true Body and Blood, “given and shed for you for the remission of sins.”

Conclusion: How then shall we be clothed to receive our Lord and Savior? How shall we be ready to meet Him not only in spirit in Bethlehem when also on that Last and Great Day when He shall come to judge the quick and the dead?

We already know the time. The time is now, it is today.

Today is the day to cast off the old clothes of the old Adam.

Today is the day to cling to the forgiveness that Jesus has won for us. This forgiveness is God's spoken righteousness.

For this forgiveness we do not have to spend money for new clothes — Jesus has paid the cost! The cost was paid on the Cross.

We do not have to worry about a garment that will go out of fashion. Jesus' forgiveness is new every morning.

Today is the day to walk anew before God, forgiven for Jesus' sake. In this forgiveness God gives us Jesus' robe of righteousness, which lets us stand unafraid, not only before the crib at Bethlehem, but also before His awe-filled and awe-some throne. Amen.

Now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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