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While You Are Waiting: Dress Appropriately

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TEXT: Romans 13:11-14 (ESV)

Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then 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. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

We spend so much of our time waiting. Ever notice that? We wait in line at the grocery store, we wait on friends or family to get ready for something or to show up somewhere. We wait in the waiting room at the clinic, or we wait for an event to begin. What do you find yourself doing as you wait? There are all kinds of things we can do, you know. Sometimes we can get into trouble while we're waiting. I remember getting into mischief as a kid as I waited for my parents to get home. I'd be poking my nose in things I shouldn't, getting into chocolate chips and other sweets mom had hidden away. And sometimes we choose to just stand around and kill time as we wait. I notice people mindlessly turn to their iPhones while they're waiting around just to kill some time. And then there are some who find ways to use their waiting time a little more constructively. They pray. They read. I saw a woman knitting. Or we could strike up a conversation with someone around us.

The reason I'm talking about waiting is because we, as the Church of Christ are currently in the season of Advent, and Advent is a season that is all about waiting – preparing for the arrival of Jesus. Of course, we wait and prepare for another celebration of his birth during the weeks ahead of Christmas. As believers, we look

forward to that time when we'll once again celebrate and sing "Joy to the world, the Lord has come," and read Scripture, gratefully remembering the arrival of the incarnate Son of God, the word made flesh, who dwelt among us, full of grace and truth, to rescue us from sin and death and the power of the devil. He lived and died and rose again and ascended into Heaven to intercede for us and we'll praise God and thank Him for this gift.

But the Advent season is also meant to remind us to not just look back, but to look ahead – that Jesus is coming again. Unlike his first birth in a cattle stall in Bethlehem, he'll arrive with power and majesty to judge the living and the dead. He'll usher in a new Heaven and a new Earth in which there will be perfect joy and love and peace for his own, and no more sin, suffering or death. Christians look forward to that promise today with great hope, knowing what awaits us. Christ's return is not something that we dreamed up. Jesus talked about it frequently in his ministry. For instance, in his parable describing the servants waiting for their master's return from a faraway country, not knowing when he'd return, but being ready for his arrival. And he described to his disciples that he would come again in a cloud with power and glory. And we knew all this is true because God affirmed every word Jesus said when he raised him from the dead.

So, we Christians are people in waiting. We live in the in-between times. The kingdom has arrived already through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, but it has not yet come in all of its fullness. Someday the promise of his return to take us to himself will be fulfilled. We don't know when, but we stay alert, waiting for it to arrive. We have a dual citizenship. We're citizens of this world and we're citizens of Heaven. We can experience God's heavenly kingdom even now. Chris Shea, in his book *The Gospel According to Jesus*, shares this story. He said,

One week I was preaching in our church about the kingdom that is coming. And on the way out, a young man grabbed me and said, Pastor, the kingdom is already here. Every Sunday I used to be in the same neighborhood. I used to come down here to a bar called Emo's and I'd start every night with a drop of ecstasy on my tongue and wash it down with Bacardi rum. That's what I did Sunday after Sunday. Now I come to a worship service instead, and I finish the evening with the body of Christ on my tongue, and I wash it down with the blood of Christ. This is the Kingdom of God.

And Shea adds to this, “This man is experiencing the kingdom. He lives in its presence. We may not recognize it, or we don't often see it, but it's right here, giving us a taste of the future to come.”

So, what should the followers of Jesus Christ be doing as we wait for that glorious day besides pray for it to come as we do in our Lord's Prayer: “Thy kingdom come”? How would you answer that question? Well, we know on the day of Christ's ascension, Jesus assigned us the task of being his witnesses for him in this world, bringing others into his kingdom. But is there anything else? Is there some way he wants us to conduct ourselves as we're waiting? And the Apostle Paul, in our passage for today, has some important insights for us as we consider that question. He says we know we're in a waiting period before Christ returns, so here's how to conduct yourself. First, he says it's time to wake up from sleep because it's a new day. Biblical scholar N.T. Wright shares a personal illustration that I find helpful to understand this statement. He writes,

When I was at boarding school, I often used to wake up early on summer mornings as the daylight came streaming in from 4:00 or 5:00 onwards. I often used to think how silly it was not to get up. Then frequently the day would be bright and sunny until about the middle of the morning when clouds would roll in and spoil it. Often it would rain later on, despite the bright early sunshine. As a keen sportsman, I used to get cross at having games spoiled by rain outs when I knew that if we'd been out playing before breakfast, we might have had several hours in the sunshine. We could always have done our homework once the rain set in. So why wouldn't my friends wake up so that we could go out and start the match?

This idea that it's important to wake up and get ahead of the day is what Paul is picking up on in this passage. While the old world is still asleep with its old habits and lifestyle, the light of the new world of God's kingdom has already broken in – it's morning.

Those who follow Jesus, who inaugurated this age, are commanded to wake up and live already according to the ways of this new day, this new world in Christ.

In fact, he reminds us in this passage that that day of salvation, the culmination of God's redemptive plans, is drawing nearer to us now than when we first believe – every day brings you one day closer to it. So, he says, because this could be your last day of life as you know it, here's how to behave yourselves as Christ followers. He uses an analogy about clothing, telling us it's important that we dress appropriately for the day. He says it like this: let us cast off, meaning take off, the works of darkness. Take off the old

clothes of the night, the old sinful habits and the ways of thinking and evil behavior. He even goes on to specifically list some of those works of darkness that need to be shed, sins of drunkenness and carousing, sexual sins like sexual immorality and sensuality. Kingdom citizens, he says, don't participate in those kinds of things anymore. There are social sins to be cast aside, such as quarrelling with people, jealousy of others and what they have. Again, cast it aside. Take those clothes off. If you are in Christ Jesus, you are not to wear them anymore, Paul says, it's time to take off the nighttime wear. And then he says, instead put on the armor of light that Christ has given you. Clothe yourself. He talks about it armor; that's what you wear in war, isn't it? Which implies that each day you live in this world as a citizen of Heaven is going to be like a battle to live out the kingdom ways of Jesus in a world that doesn't buy in, but prefers darkness. A world of principalities and powers of darkness. And that armor is described as "of light." The word used here for light is referring to righteousness. In the book of Ephesians, Paul talks of putting on the breastplate of righteousness. He's talking about living righteously before God, doing that which is right and good in God's sight, like loving our neighbor as ourselves by serving them and loving God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind – doing life His way in obedience to Him. You see, trusting in Christ for salvation, we have already been made righteous children of the light through Jesus. Therefore, we walk in the light of His righteousness, behaving righteously and doing the right things. Followers of Jesus then, are to picture in their minds that the heavenly day has dawned and that Jesus is here right before us. And we ask ourselves on each day, "Now what? How would I behave? He's here. What is really eternally important? What will last forever?" Paul says, "Let's walk properly, as in the daytime." To walk is a metaphor for how to conduct yourself. Properly can be also referred to as decently doing good. He says, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires."

What does it mean to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, to clothe yourself in Christ? As I said just a moment ago, there's one sense, of course, in which we've already put on Christ, as we trust in him, we are legally righteous, justified before God. We are legally covered with him. We are in Christ. Tim Keller writes,

This means that we are to live as if we are clothed in Christ. For example, if a man is in a tuxedo and a woman is in a long gown and heels, it has an effect on their behavior. You look in the mirror and you see yourself dressed for an occasion of dignity and formality, so you behave accordingly. If you forget and

move about as if you're in jogging clothes, you'll look silly and probably even damage your clothes.

Well, we can apply this analogy to Christian living. We live remembering *who* we are wearing and what he did for us and what he wanted for us and what it cost him. And then we think and we behave accordingly. Paul says, "So we make no provision for the flesh because we live for him instead." We don't live for the flesh. We don't use our time thinking and strategizing about how to gratify the desires of our sinful nature called the flesh. It's easy to let our minds get focused on those things – to toy around with those desires. We know the negative results that can happen. And when we do that, we remember Eve in the garden that she thought about the Tree of Life and how desirable and promising its future looked until she finally gave in to the desires and ate from it, breaking God's command. And that little scene from Genesis gets played out again and again in people's lives, ruining things and shorting them of the life God intended for them. And Paul says put on Christ because putting on Christ, remembering who we are in Christ, that we live in his presence and we can lean on him and we know he's coming again, can keep us from toying around with sinful desires in our minds. We've got our minds stayed on him.

So, it's important to know how to keep clothing ourselves with Christ. How can we, like the old spiritual says declare, "I woke up this morning with my mind, stayed on Jesus."? Paul actually talks of how we do that in chapter 12 of Romans. He says, "I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, after all that God has done for you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice wholly and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." In other words, live a life of righteousness. He says, "Do not be conformed to this world," you know the mindset of this world, "but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. That by testing you may discern what's the will of God and what's good and acceptable and perfect." Now, did you catch that line? Be transformed by the renewal of your mind. You keep your mind on Jesus – and how do you keep your mind on Jesus? You do that by opening up the Word of God each and every day to bring you back to the truth of who you are, what he has done for you, what he promises you, and what kind of conduct delights him the most. And the Holy Spirit uses this means to renew our minds in Christ and transform us to live and think more in line with Jesus. The Word of God is a very powerful thing. It changes one's life trajectory.

So, there are two things I hope this advent message will move you to do today. First, may it move you to join me in rejoicing in the truth that he's coming again and keep it at

the center stage of your mind. It's meant to serve as a wakeup call for you and me to ground us in the confident hope and truth that the savior who came to save us from sin and death is coming again in power and majesty to take you and me to himself so that we can live with him forever and his heavenly kingdom. And that, my friend, is good news to rejoice and count on every day.

And next then, recommit yourself to behaving as a citizen of Heaven as you're waiting for it to come in its fullness, which means living righteously and loving people and walking in the ways of Jesus, who actually put it this way: "You're the light of the world. Let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works. And give glory to your father in Heaven." It's a tall order, I know, for those of us who are waiting. But remember, we are not left on our own in living this out. We have the Holy Spirit, don't we? He is with us and in us, empowering us to walk properly and to put on the Lord Jesus Christ each day and shine for Him. So, let's pray right now, and each and every day, asking for his help. Lord, thank you for coming to our world the first time to save us from sin and death. Now by the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to conduct ourselves as citizens of Heaven and children of light, as we wait for the day of your return in power and majesty and glory. And we will live with you forever. Amen.