

SERMON: Living in the Light

TEXT: Romans 13:11-14

*Wait Until Dark* is the name of a movie from 1967 starring Audrey Hepburn. It is a thriller in which Hepburn plays a woman named Suzy who has recently become blind. She is terrorized by a trio of thugs who are after a doll stuffed with heroin which they believe to be in her apartment. Although the thieves seem to have the upper hand, as they can hide in plain sight, Suzy discovers she can protect herself by removing all the lightbulbs from her apartment. By now, she has learned how to get around in the dark, while these men are left helpless without any light.

This is the time of year when many of us struggle with the darkness of shorter days. When the skies are dark and gloomy like they have been recently, I feel very lazy and have little desire to leave the house. And when nighttime begins at 5:00 p.m. – even after a sunny day – I begin to feel completely sapped of energy, and all I want to do is sleep.

For some people this feeling can become so severe as to bring on a type of depression known as SAD, or Seasonal Affective Disorder. For the majority of cases, it begins in late autumn and subsides in the spring. Often light has a lot to

do with it, and special lights have been designed to provide therapy for those who suffer.

Listen again to what the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome about darkness and light. “Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

We ought to hang our heads in shame to realize that we’ve not made much progress in over 2,000 years toward LIVING IN THE LIGHT. Paul’s list of *the works of darkness* is still quite descriptive of our society today. We may think of quarreling and jealousy as more applicable to children and teenagers, reveling and drunkenness as behaviors marking youth and young adults, but the truth is that such behavior is rampant among supposedly mature adults. While debauchery and licentiousness are words that have faded from our vocabularies, a quick check of the dictionary leaves no doubt that such behavior is still very much alive.

Debauchery is defined as extreme indulgence in bodily pleasures involving sex, drugs, and alcohol. And licentiousness is a lack of legal or moral restraints, marked by disregard for strict rules of correctness.

But for those who profess to follow Christ, a change in behavior is called for. And not only because salvation is near, not only because Jesus is coming again and we don't want to be "caught" misbehaving, but because we are representatives of Jesus. We are called to "put on Christ" like we put on clothing, so that when people see us they will see Christ. We are called to "lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light, to live honorably as in the day."

One Biblical scholar explained the reason for Paul's exhortation: "It is not fear, threats, or judgment: it is the very nearness of salvation, that Christ's return is now closer than it has ever been. Time, of course, is not so straightforward for the Christian: the *night*... while far gone, is still present; the day is dawning, but is not fully present. Sin and death have been defeated in Christ, but the old age has not yet been fully set aside. Those who belong to the new age—who share the destiny of Christ—will face temptations to return to the old age. Thus the call to persevere. The *day*, which refers to the new age that has dawned in Christ, is spoken of with the same verb that Jesus uses for the kingdom of God in the gospels: it has *drawn*

*near*. In other words, it is here but not yet in its fullness. (Orrey McFarland, Commentary on Romans 13:11-14, [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org), December 1, 2019)

As disciples of Christ, this is our work. This is who we are. We have received the Christ who came as a child. But as a man, he promised to come again. And even though his second coming is taking so much longer than anyone ever imagined, we must not submit to the darkness. We must not grow sleepy or lazy. We must keep awake and keep working toward the new day, the day of salvation. The fulfillment of God's kingdom and the realization of God's promises. Especially when we are feeling like the darkness may defeat us, we must keep **LIVING IN THE LIGHT.**

While it may be disconcerting at first, the defensive image of the *armor* of light makes sense when we realize that the darkness is our enemy. So, we need some armor, some way of protecting ourselves against the all-consuming darkness. And, though it may seem a weak attempt, we decorate our homes and churches and businesses with lights to brighten the darkness of this season. As these tiny lights give us just a glimmer of hope, we may find greater strength to shine a light to reveal and expose the ills of our society.

I recently learned about a program of Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery called *Light for the Darkness*. The program seeks to “bring the light of Christ into the darkness of mental illness.” Spirituality is one of eight dimensions of wellness identified by the Mental Health Services Administration. *Light for the Darkness* currently offers two groups meeting weekly in the St. Louis area where people with mental illness can connect, be heard, and explore their spirituality. The intellectual and social dimensions of wellness are also incorporated into these groups. The goals of *Light for the Darkness* include adding two more groups in the New Year and publishing group resource materials, especially for churches in rural areas who feel called to provide spiritual and emotional care.

Putting on the armor of light and LIVING IN THE LIGHT also means having the courage to stand up and speak up for justice, by shining a light and exposing the injustices of our world against people of color, immigrants, the poor, the homeless, and those who identify as LGBTQ.

The Isaiah passage we read earlier also follow this theme of light. So we can say that putting on the armor of light also means, “beating our swords into plowshares, and our spears into pruning hooks.” We are to turn weapons of war and violence into tools for growth and harvest and life. “Nation shall not lift up

sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” This message to the “house of Jacob,” remains a clear and relevant call from God today: “Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!”

We are to shine a light in the darkness, not in ignorance of or blindness to what’s going on in the world around us, but in spite of it and in solidarity against it. We are to share hope with those who are overcome by despair. We are to demonstrate peace that passes understanding in times of turmoil.

Furthermore, let us not mistake this as simply a *Christmas cheer*, temporary way of being. No. Wherever and whenever we encounter darkness, we must shine the light of the newborn and risen Christ and give the gifts of peace, hope, joy, and love to the world.

Christ came long ago. Christ comes here and now. Christ will come again at an unknown hour. But the time for us to proclaim him is now.

Believers, “you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness

and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day” – every day... to the glory of God!

AMEN.