

"Wake Up!"

Romans 13:11-14

November 28, 2010

1st Sunday In Advent

One of the most necessary, yet most hated, inventions of all time has got to be the alarm clock. Unneeded long ago when people went to bed soon after dusk and arose naturally at dawn, the alarm clock is crucial today. It is needed to get us to where we need to be. By waking us up, even if it is done harshly and unpleasantly, the alarm clock insures that we get to school or work on time. It is hated because we like it where we are at. We don't particularly want to wake up and get up. We are warm and comfortable, especially on these cold "autumn" mornings we've had lately. But that's precisely why we need a wake up call: to get us from where we want to be to where we need to be.

In the same way, we need a wake up call in our spiritual lives. In our epistle reading for today, Paul says, "the hour has come for you to wake up from sleep." Who is Paul talking to? It's quite easy (and natural) for us to look outside the church and think those are the people who are asleep in unbelief. We would agree with Paul and smugly say, "Yeah, those people need to wake up and get their act together."

But Paul is not addressing unbelievers here. He is talking to Christians. His message is for you and me. He is telling us, "It's time to wake up!" But, you might wonder, if we believe in Jesus, how are we "sleeping"? Luther said that this is a spiritual sleep where Christians live in sin and are comfortable in it. He goes on to say that this is not about unbelievers "but rather about Christians who are living lukewarm lives and are snoring in their smugness...they are smug, going their way without the fear of God, hardened, impious, insensitive." (AE, 25, p.478)

This is a result of what Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace". He said, "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance." It is preaching the

gospel in such a way that says, "Of course you have sinned, but now everything is forgiven, so you can stay as you are and enjoy the consolations of forgiveness."

Christians have been lulled into the sleep of thinking that forgiveness of sin equals permission to continue in sin and that God doesn't expect us to change our way of living because "He loves us just the way we are." Instead of repenting of our sin, we have become comfortable in our sin. It's like being in a warm comfy bed on a cold winter morning. We have to get up to face the day but we want to stay in the comfort of our bed. We have to turn from our sin in repentance, but we want to stay in the comfort of our sin.

While that may be a natural way to feel, it is a dangerous one. There is a popular phrase that says, "You snooze, you lose." If you stay asleep and don't get out of bed, you'll lose your grades at school or you'll lose your job. If you stay asleep in sin and don't get out, something far worse will happen: you'll lose your salvation.

It's time to wake up! The day of salvation – Christ's return in glory to deliver us from this evil age and bring us to the age which is to come in heaven – "is nearer to us now than when we first believed." The night of this age, dominated by sin and ending in death, is far gone. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross has taken care of that. His life has been offered as the complete sacrifice for sin. His death has ended death's reign over us. The day of the coming age, marked by holiness, joy, and peace and resulting in everlasting life, is at hand. Jesus' resurrection from the dead has made those things a reality.

Since Jesus' resurrection and ascension, we and others who have gone before us live in a time when both the old age and the new age overlap. We are exposed to both and can be influenced by either. "The far-gone night is still a power that seeks to make us sons of darkness and of night, doomed to perish with the dying night." (Franzmann, p.239) The new day beckons us forward with promises of unspeakable and unimaginable blessing. "To live as in the day therefore involves a struggle; it calls for action, decisive action." (Franzmann, p.239)

The struggle involves “the works of darkness” - sin. Paul gives three pairs of examples. First, there are wild partying and drunkenness. Once recognized as wrong, these have become socially acceptable in many circles. Secondly, there is sexual immorality and excesses of all kind. The so-called “seven deadly sins” consists of excessive behaviors: wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy, and gluttony. Some of these are excesses of good behavior – greed for wise money management, sloth for rest, lust for sexual desire, gluttony for proper diet. Some of these are viewed as tough but virtuous traits – greed, pride, and envy. Thirdly, there are the more common sins of quarreling and jealousy which frequently exhibit themselves even in the Church. Nothing tears a church apart – not even major scandals – more than constant quarreling over insignificant things and jealousy among individuals and groups.

The Greek word for sleep is *hypnos* from which we get “hypnotize”. Sometimes, as Christians, we allow the world to “hypnotize” us into accepting such behavior and even becoming involved in such behavior. We are not to allow that to happen. Instead, we are not only regret or repent of the works of darkness, but to cast off the works of darkness. We are to lay aside and separate ourselves from them.

It is what we are to *put on* that gives us power for that struggle. We are to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the One who has overcome the works of darkness. He is the One who can overcome the works of darkness in us. In a sense, we have already put on the Lord Jesus Christ. As the Scriptures say, “for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” (Gal. 3:27). In Baptism, we have participated in Jesus’ death and resurrection. In Christ, we have reached the frontier of the world to come.

Therefore, “casting off the works of darkness” and “walk[ing] properly as in the daytime” means simply to live in our baptism. We are to live lives of daily repentance in which we return to our baptism, confessing our sins, and finding the pools of life-giving forgiveness there. By doing that daily

and not just weekly in a church service or even less regularly than that, we allow less chance for the works of darkness to deceive us, overcome us, or crush us.

The second thing we are to put on is the armor of light. Some translate this word “weapons of light.” Ephesians 6 reminds us that the only weapon in the armor of God is “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (Eph.6:17) The more we use the Word of God in its various forms in private devotions and family devotions, as well as in public worship and study, the less we will be lured into the works of darkness and, thus, deceived. Reading the Word of God as it is written, hearing the Word of God as it is read, preached, spoken to absolve you, and tasting the Word of God as it is put in your mouth in the forms of bread and wine will keep you “walking properly as in the daytime”.

The last thing Paul tells us to do is to “make no provision for the flesh.” He is not saying that we should not take care of our bodies. But, in anything we do to provide for the needs for our body, we should not do anything which will stir up our sinful flesh into action. If drunkenness is your problem, then having a case of beer in the fridge may not be a good idea. If sexual immorality is your problem, then having cable TV or unfiltered internet may not be a good idea. As one church father once said, “He who cherishes his flesh nourishes an enemy.”

A friend of mine in college had an Oscar the Grouch alarm clock. Every morning this character from Sesame Street would awaken him at the appointed hour with these charming words, “Wake up! You might as well get up. It’s going to be another miserable day!” Alarm clocks are depressing enough without having depressing messages with them. Many see the alarm clock call of Advent in the same way – depressing. But it’s not. It’s a call to stop sleeping in sin or being hypnotized by the ways of this world which is a good thing. Wake up! Put off the works of darkness that seek to drag you down. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ who covers you with His holiness and empowers you to walk properly in the daytime. Our salvation is getting nearer and nearer. That’s exciting! Let’s be awake and ready for it to be here! Amen.

