

Put On the Light!

St. Mark Lutheran
Two Advent services

Pastor Ken Welsh
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And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. Romans 13:11-14

Our theme verse for our Advent services today is the second part of Romans 13: 12, "So put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light." Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever enjoyed the adventurous routine of going to a tree farm, or going just out in the woods, to cut down a fresh tree to stand in your home as a Christmas tree? After hauling the best tree you can find, loading it in your vehicle, and muscling it into the house, there is still a lot to do. I always found with cut trees the biggest challenge was putting it in the stand so that it would stand straight. Then you had to turn and turn it so you had the best side facing the front.

Once the positioning of the Christmas tree has been accomplished, people generally step back, catch their breath, and admire how the tree looks for a few moments. But as we look at it, a tree is usually pretty but is sort of shrouded by darkness. We remember that it is time to put the lights on and decorate the tree with ornaments and sometimes tinsel. This brings out the beauty of the tree and it becomes a sparking source of light that helps light up the entire room.

In one way or another, most Christians are busy during the Advent season readying their homes with lights and decorations. These lights have a purpose: to remind us to celebrate that Jesus Christ has entered human history as "the light of the world" to shine through the darkness of sin and death.

In our text from Romans 13 today/tonight, Paul also speaks of us being prepared for Christ, the light of the world. However, the day for which Paul encourages us to be prepared is not Christmas. He wants to be sure we are prepared spiritually for Christ's second coming. That is the main day for which we should be prepared, the day when Christ comes in all his splendor, power, and might with all the heavenly angels.

Earlier in Paul's writings in Romans, he gently reminded us that we are sinners and by nature love the darkness. Not much good, if any, happens in the darkness of the world. Many of the sins that we get ourselves into, happen in the dark, don't they, at a time and place when no one can see them?

So it is that Paul encourages us to put away the works that need to be hidden by darkness. He says, "Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy." If we want to be honest with ourselves, the list of the things of darkness is a lot longer than that. Across our country and right here in Geauga County drug addiction would make the list also.

We, as God's dearly loved children, have been called to be children of the light. We are set apart from the world. Yes, it is difficult to live as we should and we need to help. We can be drawn to the dark and mesmerized by it. Paul's words remind us: "Let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light." Is there an area of your life now that is part of the darkness, that is pulling you down or holding you back, that is keeping you from being the light for Christ that you have been called to be? If so, confess it to the Lord, ask his helping in abandoning it, and follow in the way of Christ, not out of fear but because of the love he has shown for us.

God is here to help us in a number of ways. First of all, under a darkened sky on Good Friday, Jesus was crucified to pierce the darkness and fulfill the many prophecies that God would send a Savior. And God's love for us did not end when Christ died on the cross. His love for his creation continues to shine through Christ as he gave us the Holy Spirit, in Word and in Sacrament, to help us renew the gift of saving faith. Through God's grace, we know that we have been forgiven and can be empowered to live in the righteous life of Christ.

Paul's also calls on us to "put on the armor of light" in Ephesians 6. He gives some specific directions about how to do that by putting on the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the sandals of readiness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit. Do you know what the sword of the Spirit is? It is the Word of God. Christians who take these things seriously are much more likely to have joy-filled lives.

Christians who take these things seriously are much more likely to be "little lights for Christ" in the world, to bring light to areas where there is darkness. They are more likely to enjoy peace in their families; have patience with their children; express kindness, goodness, and gentleness with those who hurt us; and have more self-control with those who differ with us.

There is one area of our "armor of light" that I would have you pay particular attention to: that is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. President Cripe in his visit here last month showed us a chart which indicated that that we have about 475 members in our church, but there is a huge gap between the number of members and the average number of people in church on Sunday, about 210. This is a problem that crosses denominational lines. A recent survey of Bible reading on our country indicates that only 13% of Christians read their Bible frequently.

I can only say, that during my lifetime, I have seen a tremendous correlation between a person's spiritual strength and their frequent attention to Christ's Word and the Sacraments. You can have all sorts of lights on the tree, but if the string is not plugged into the power source, they will not be giving off light. May God this Advent rekindle or strengthen that light within us, that we might radiate it to others. Amen.

