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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
December 1, 2019
1st Sunday in Advent

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 2:1-5, Mathew 24:37-44
Hymns: 64; 611:1-6; 408; 611:7 (73:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Romans 13:11-14

And *do* this, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed. ¹² The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts.

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, our Coming Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: The snooze button can be a dangerous thing!

Most morning's I don't touch the snooze button. The problem is if I hit it the first time because I just want to keep my eyes closed for a little longer I will likely hit it a

second and even a third time! Then sometimes if I miss and I hit the other button thinking I hit the snooze button I'm late getting up and everything's a rush, and things don't always get done! That's what comes when one chooses to ignore the alarm, the wake-up call we have that let's know it's time to be up and about the business before us.

You know the idea of a wake-up call isn't limited to getting up in the morning. Politically we are told of wake-up calls for the national debt, or societal violence, or racial injustice, or the cost of health care. I guess the biggest one lately has been regarding global warming. This poor young girl from Scandinavia has been pushed forward as the leading spokesperson to try to guilt-trip the world, but primarily American into doing something about global warming. Of course the proposed solutions border on the ridiculous. Eliminate all airplane travel, and all fossil based fuels even for heating homes before the end of the next decade. If you don't, we will all die, and the world will come to an end.

The reason I bring this up is that we have been desensitized to wake-up calls. We just don't listen to them anymore. The one that we need to hear and respond to the most has been around the longest and so maybe it seems to be the least probable of happening, and that is the wake-up call regarding Christ's return. The words of our text were written almost 2000 years ago, and here I stand in front of you repeating --

THEME: A "Wake-up Call" for Christ's Coming.

It is important that we don't let this message go in one ear and out the other as we might do with other wake-up calls originating within the minds of man. Even if they come from very intelligent people with the best of intentions, these other wake-up calls are not on the same level as the one before us, for this one comes to us by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, with the authority and sincerity of **God**

speaking to us of Jesus' coming in glory. We are told here

I. He's Coming Sooner than You Think!

Romans 13:11-12a And *do* this, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed. ¹² The night is far spent, the day is at hand.

It is all about an awareness of the times in which we live. It is about timing! It is time to start living that Christian life of love which the verses immediately before our text encourage. Maybe Paul's statement that our salvation is nearer than when we first believed seems obvious. Jesus' second coming is closer than when we first believed. You might say, well of course it is! Every day that passes means that the Day of Christ's return is a day closer. Of course it is, but sometimes one needs to hear the obvious because we are oblivious to what is going on in the world, and in the kingdom of God! We behave and even adopt the attitude of the world that everything is going to keep on going just as it has been going for the last few thousand years. My friends, that is just not true!

Our gospel lesson reminded us of how it was in the days of Noah. The Lord gave a 120 year warning to the world. Noah building the ark was a continuing reminder to the world that things as they were, were going to come to sudden end. But life went on. People got up and went to work, and got married and people celebrated, and had babies, and people died. Every morning everybody got up and started another day, and everything in the world went on as the day before, **until it didn't**. They forgot that every day they were a day closer to judgment, and so they didn't repent. They didn't take the Lord's words and promises seriously. Only Noah's family was saved in the ark. So it isn't silly for us to be reminded of the obvious: the day of the Lord is closer than when we first believed.

The Day of the Lord's coming is drawing near. The night is far spent, the Day is at hand. Even if the Lord's return doesn't come in my lifetime or yours it is important to hear and take that reminder to heart. We don't know the number of our days, but I know that each day I am a day closer to the end of my days, and I shouldn't live like I have all the time in eternity to be about the Christian business the Lord has entrusted to me for this life.

We need to also check our attitude about that Day of Jesus' return in another way. Many think of it as a dreadful day, even calling it Dooms Day! It is sad that it will be exactly that for far too many people, but it shall not be that for you or me if we continue to hold on to the hope that we have in Christ. Paul said that our **salvation** is nearer than when we first believed. Salvation was secured for us on Calvary when Jesus suffered and died for the sins of the world. The truth of resurrection was verified for us by Jesus' resurrection on the third day. This is what is closer then when we first believed and this is all WONDERFUL! What is closer for us is the hope of glory and the eternal life in that bliss where we shall always be with the Lord; and all the grief and pain and sorrows of this life will have passed away. We are closer to this Day of our final redemption when Jesus comes to take to Himself His purchased possession.

That is something we can be and should be excited about.

II. We Need to Wake Up from Spiritual Lethargy!

We need a wake-up call just like getting up in the morning when we have a full and busy day ahead of us, one that we are anticipating as being a GOOD day. We should be ready to jump up and get dressed and ready to meet the day and make the most of it.

That is what our text is encouraging for our spiritual lives. As much as we do that for exciting days in this life, we are generally pretty lethargic about our spiritual lives. For too

many thoughts of church evoke a heavy sigh. Yes, we should probably go to church. It will be good for us, but maybe I don't feel like hearing all about that mundane stuff about Jesus, and how He in the greatness of His love for fallen sinners came down to earth to fulfil God's law for me, and to bear the curse of my sin, and appease God's wrath for me. Oh yes, Jesus actually secured a righteousness that the Lord in His grace gives to me freely, and calls me to faith through this gospel, so I know the hope of life and salvation. Yeah, I know all that so what else is new! Now I deliberately sounded bored, as bored as I could because too often we think of the gospel as boring!

Excuse me, but the gospel is not the mundane and ordinary. The gospel is exceptional and exciting!

You know, that's the thing about being lethargic to something that should fill us with excitement. One often doesn't even realize that one is behaving in a lethargic manner. If you are going through life with a "I can take it or leave it" attitude toward the gospel, that "I might go to church if I feel like, if nothing more important comes up like washing my hair, or doing laundry, or vacuuming out my car." You know in 44 years of ministry I have been presented with the lamest excuses for why one simply can't make it to church, and "more important" characterized those things frequently. Spiritual lethargy is dangerous. If you think washing the car is more pressing than hearing the Word of the Lord with your fellow believers you are falling asleep spiritually and you just might lose your most precious treasure while dozing off.

The Lord is sending you a wake-up call right now. Get up and get dressed in the clothing of righteousness which the Lord bought for you with His own blood. In our text the Lord talks about putting off the clothing of this world as casting off the works of darkness. And putting on the armor of light! The armor of light protects us from the devil's piercing accusation and temptations. We are encouraged to walk properly as in the daylight!

Most generally we see the excesses of life exaggerated in the darkness of night. People go out for a night on the town! We all know what that means. It isn't a quiet dinner at a little café and maybe a movie. It's clubbing, and letting one's hair down, and having some fun. And it's letting it all run to the excesses that sadly make the news from time to time when people lose control in their sports celebrations with drunken revelry.

Works of darkness don't often happen in the light of day. People generally behave far more seriously and carefully in the light of day. They use better judgment. They actually remember that people are watching. That is the illustration here, and we don't need to belabor it any farther. Those works of the flesh are sinful. Wild revelry, and drunkenness, and lewd behavior and promotion of lusts of the flesh, and arguments and strife and envy are all things the devil rejoices to see in the world, and especially among those who confess themselves to be children of God. That which leads the devil to rejoice causes the Lord, well, no joy.

Rather we ought to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. When people look at us they should see Jesus. We ought to wear Jesus by living in love, and adorning ourselves with the fruits of the Spirit. Paul lists these fruits of the Spirit in -

Galatians 5:22-25 "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. ²⁴And those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

These qualities are things the world notices, but they are increasingly rare in the world. All too often even those who try to be a little nicer, and say they are going to "pay it forward," do so for the wrong reasons. They want to make this world a better place so that they will be living in

a better place. That doesn't sound so bad, because it isn't so bad that is what we call "civic righteousness" and we count it as a blessing when such civility prevails in society. But what about when things are not so nice, and people treat you badly, then how are we to respond? It is still with love and gentleness and kindness and goodness, and self-control. It is not about making the world a better place but about putting on Christ, so that people in the world see Jesus when they watch us in our lives. Forgive as Christ has forgiven you. Love as you have been loved by Jesus. Be good as the Lord is good to us in all our ways. Be faithful even as your Father in heaven is faithful.

Finally make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts. Sometimes I say that we daren't entertain the thought of sin. We toy with sin in our minds. We know we ought not to do or say certain things, but "I sure would like to tell that old so and so, a thing or two, and make his ears burn!" That's making provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts. This will vary from one Christian to another because we each have our own areas of weakness where we can all too easily present our flesh the opportunity to covet, or engage in sensual pleasure, or indulge in excessive eating or drinking. And then we not only let ourselves down, or one or another of our loved ones as we tumble into rudeness and sin, but we let down the Lord who has entrusted us with spiritual blessings and a high calling as His children and heirs of life.

It takes a bit of personal introspection, and contemplation to see what we should remove from our lives so that we make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts, but we are the Lord's, and we bear **His** name before the world, and that is our highest calling.

So today we as begin a new church year we prepare ourselves for the Lord's coming. To that end the Lord has given us a wake-up call. May we hear it, and benefit from it, and not hit the snooze button, but rather leap up and

ready ourselves to engage the day, living to His glory, and watching for the Day of His return.

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)