

There's a real tendency to see Advent as a countdown to Christmas. Just look at the world around you. There are many who are putting up Christmas decorations. The stores and the radio stations have started to play Christmas music. In fact, if you have an Advent calendar, I'd probably guess that it's a countdown to December 25, counting down the days to Christmas. As a result of that, I think that we tend to see Advent as the Christmas season. The world certainly sees it that way. And for the world, the Christmas season is a time of spending. It is a time of shopping. It's a time of getting everything that you need in preparation for Christmas. We just had Black Friday, right? Buy all the things that you can so that you'll be ready when Christmas Day comes! And it's very easy for us to get caught up in that excitement. It is very exciting! But it becomes just as easy for us to start thinking and acting the way that the world does in these things.

But Christians, Advent is more than the time before Christmas. Advent is a time of reflection. It is a time of self-examination. And so I want you to ask yourselves this question this morning: Are you ready for Jesus to come? Or do you find yourself thinking and acting like the world? Because if you think and act like the world, Christians, you're not going to be ready for the coming of Christ. And the way that we can tell if we are ready is not by our decorations or the music we listen to or anything like that. That stuff is just fine. We tell that we are ready by the way that we are living, by the way that we think and the way that we act, by the character of our lives. So ask yourselves again: Is there a difference between the way that you live and the way that the unbelieving world lives? And if someone else were to compare the two, would they be able to tell the difference? If not, wake up! Because Jesus will soon be here. That is the message that Paul brings to us today in our epistle lesson from Romans chapter 13.

Because Paul begins this section by reminding us what time it actually is. As we hear in the beginning of the reading: "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 the picture that Paul is painting here is of the very early morning, that time when the sun has not quite come up. That time when the sky is brightening in the east, and the sky is full of oranges and reds, like it was this morning. And we know that the day will soon be here. And in this picture that Paul paints for us, we are in bed, starting to wake up. Now, I know that we live in a world that is ruled by clocks and by electric lights. We are not ruled by the sun. We don't start our day with sunrise and go to bed at sunset. That's not how we live. So we might misunderstand what Paul is getting at here. But what he's saying is that this is the time for us to get up. This is the time for us to start the work of the day. Because if we stay in bed now, with the sun so close to rising, or if we go back to sleep, we're going to be unprepared. We're not going to be ready for the work of the day. We're burning daylight! As we like to say. It's time to get up! It's time to get to work, because the day is near.

But this urgency that we feel, Christians, about our work, about getting to the work of the day, is the same urgency that we should feel as Christians. Because Paul is not talking about the coming of daylight here. He is talking about the coming of the great Day of the Lord. And we are in bed, so to speak, a spiritual bed. And Christ, who is the sun of righteousness, as Malachi calls him, is soon to appear. So we have to ask ourselves: are we going to get up and get ready for the coming of that day? Or will we stay in bed along with the rest of the world? Because night is the time of the world, Christians. It is the time of sin. And just like when the day comes, the night disappears, so also the coming of Christ will mean that sin will disappear. And for anyone who is

still sleeping, who is still in sin, when he appears, they will be judged along with the world. Or to put it even more plainly, those who belong to the night, who are still asleep, will not inherit the Kingdom of God. So get up, Christians! Time's a wastin'! Jesus will soon be here.

So Christians, I want you to examine yourselves very carefully this morning. Ask yourselves: are you awake, or are you asleep? Are you living the way that the world does, living in darkness? Or are you living the way that God has called you to be, walking in the light of Christ? And to answer those questions, consider this. Do the things that Paul talks about in our reading for today describe you? Do they describe your life? And he gives us three pairs to describe what he's talking about.

The first pair being "orgies and drunkenness." Now the word translated here as "orgies" doesn't mean something sexual. Paul is talking about uncontrolled eating. So in other words, the two of them together talk about uncontrolled eating and drinking, partying, so to speak, living for the moment, living just for right now, not really caring about anything that is to happen. A complete lack of self-control. And even the world calls this kind of behavior shameful if it's done during the day, right? That's why we say that it's shameful to drink too early in the day. But the question, Christians, is: does this describe your life? Are you living only for right now, living only for pleasure?

The second pair we have here is "sexual immorality and sensuality." The first one describing sexual things in excess, doing them too much, and the second one describing a lack of restraint. So in other words, adultery in all of its various forms. Because we're not talking just about adultery strictly speaking. But just as Jesus says in Matthew 5: "I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." So it is anything that leads us to impurity, anything that leads us into sin. And that could even be impure movies or impure partying, whatever it may be. Does this describe your life? Are you living in an impure way?

And the last pair that he has here is "quarreling and jealousy," being quick to pick a fight, always being against someone else. Quick to pick sides, and holding up your side above all things, even above the truth. That you always are part of a faction. You're always part of some party, and that's what you hold to, no matter what. Being at war with those with whom you should be at peace. Does that describe your life? Are you constantly at war?

Christians, if these things do describe you, wake up! Because these are the works of darkness, and the works of darkness are exactly that which Christ is coming to destroy. This is not how we as Christians are called to live!

Because you do not belong to the night, Christians. You do not belong to the darkness. As Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5: "You are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness." This is true because you belong to God in Jesus Christ and because of what he has done for you to forgive you your sins. Jesus, as Peter says in 1 Peter 2, has "called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." And through the gift of the Holy Spirit, God has awakened you to greet the coming Day, so that you are no longer asleep like the world. You are different, Christians. God has called you to be different. And God calls you to be awake.

So let us not stay in bed, then, in the pajamas of sin. Let us get up and put on the clothes of the day, the clothes of the armor of light. Instead of partying and drunkenness, let us put on self-control. Instead of adultery, let us put on purity. Instead of fighting, let us put on peace. Instead of sin, let us put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. And then Christians, being the Christians God has called us to be, we will be ready for the coming of our Lord.

So as Advent begins then, let us cast off the works of darkness, because we are the sons of light, the sons of God. And we are who we are because of what Jesus has done for us to forgive us our sins. So get up, Christians! Wake up! Greet the coming Day! Because Jesus will soon be here.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have called us out of darkness into your marvelous light through your Son, Jesus Christ. We pray that you would help us to always be watchful for his coming, so that we may greet that Day with joy. In his name we pray. Amen.