

Text: Romans 13:11-14.

First Sunday in Advent.

November 27, 2016

Grace and peace are yours through our coming Savior, Jesus. Amen.

My dad used to have this really old, ratty shirt that he wore to work outside or around the house. My mom kept trying to convince him to just get rid of that old, ratty shirt. He wouldn't do it. Then one day my dad was at a work day at church, cleaning with a bunch of fellow Christians. He had on the old, ratty shirt, on top of a t-shirt. Well, he started working. Got warmed up. Took off the old, ratty shirt and set it down. Someone else at the work day saw the old, ratty shirt. Thought it was a rag. Tore it up into several pieces and proceeded to clean with it. The work day is over. My dad comes back looking for the shirt. Can't find it. Asks around, "Where's my shirt?" "Well, what did it look like?" The person who used it for a rag let out a big laugh. "You were wearing that shirt? You still want it? I thought it was a rag. Tore it up. Worked pretty nice." My dad was not happy. My mom was. She won the battle of the old, ratty shirt. That old, ratty shirt is what we are used to, spiritually. It's comfortable, for our sin-stained souls. It's easy to wear, as we naturally are. But my friends, God has better clothes for you. God wants to rip off those old, ratty shirts of sin we like to wear, leave us naked for a second and exposed to the reality of our sin, so God can cover us with a perfect robe, the robe of holiness Jesus won for us, the robe of righteousness Jesus gives you in baptism, the robe of perfection that completely covers your sin and lets only Jesus shine through. I know we say in our theme today, "Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ." But don't think we can buy these clothes. They are given. Don't think it's all up to us to put on these clothes. Jesus already put these clothes on you at your baptism. And Jesus continues to give you fresh, clean perfect clothes to wear every day.

We need to understand the present time. The darkness of sin keeps spreading. It used to be a big deal if a man cheated on his wife. Now we have a word that sounds nice. An affair. An affair sounds like a good thing. People have "open" marriages, as though they are the open-minded ones. We could give 100 more examples of how common sin is in the present time.

But we first need to see how the commonness of sin has infiltrated our own hearts, too. We need to wake up from our slumber. We live in days like it was before the flood. People were living life. Eating, drinking, doing the things people do. Just busy with life and no time for God. Busy with life and no time for God. Doesn't that sound familiar? I'm busy. Don't have time. That's the excuse of the present time. Too busy for God. Maybe after soccer season, or after basketball season or after baseball season we won't be so busy and we will have more time for God. Maybe after the kids are older. Maybe after. Maybe after. Maybe after. Wake up! The hour has come! Every day you are one day closer to heaven, or hell.

Thank God that he did wake us up from slumber. He roused us with the water of baptism. God raised us from the deadness of our sins. God has opened our eyes to see, our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. I had to wrestle with this phrase, ask, "What does this mean?" Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed? Didn't Jesus win salvation for us on the cross 2000 years ago, so isn't that salvation farther away? Didn't Jesus apply the salvation he won on May 23, 1971, the day of my baptism, so isn't that application of salvation farther away? But consider this. Every day we are one day closer to Christ coming again. That's what we celebrate in Advent, the coming of Christ in the flesh at Christmas and at the end of the world. Every day we are one day closer to the full realization of our salvation in heaven. And every day, the time we have on this earth to glorify God and serve our neighbor gets one day less. We better get at it. We better quit being so busy with all this other stuff.

The night is nearly over. The day is almost here. The day we are talking about here is the Lord's day, the

last day, sometimes called judgment day. I prefer the Lord's day because I think it sounds more positive, but no matter what you call it, it's coming! The certainty of Christ's coming is not in question, only the timing is. We can't avoid it. We can't ignore the reality of Christ's coming. Just like you can pretend you still have all kinds of time to do stuff before Christmas, but it's surely coming. You can pretend you have all kinds of time to do stuff on earth before Jesus comes, but he is surely coming. The day is almost here. So put aside the deeds of darkness. Get rid of those old, ratty shirts of sin. And put on the armor of light. That's really a cool picture, isn't it? The armor of light! Just picture a person wearing an armor of light. He's the guy you want on your side, right? He's the guy that would attract you. That's one picture of this armor of light. It's attractive. People want to be close to the light.

Being a competitive person, I like the victory aspect. When light meets darkness, light wins. The armor of light defeats the darkness, just like Jesus Christ, the light of the world, defeated the darkness of sin and conquered the darkness of the devil. There's also that picture of armor showing that this is war. Darkness will keep trying to attack you. Sin will keep trying to conquer you. The devil will never stop tempting you. But you have God's tools to win. Put on the armor of light. Wear your baptism every day. It reminds you how much God loves you. When you are tempted, say, "I am baptized!" When the creeping darkness of the present time tries to pull you away from God, say, "I don't have to live like everyone else. I'm wearing the armor of light. I don't have to listen to popular opinion. I answer to a higher power, the highest power, God himself." This armor of light covers up our past sins. This armor of light lets only Jesus show through. This armor of light defeats the devil. This armor of light attracts people to us.

We will behave decently, as in the daytime. Right? During the day people usually do what they are supposed to do. They go to work. They pick up the kids. They eat supper. It all looks pretty much the same. But what do people do at night? When they think no one is looking? Well, we have a six-part list, three groups of two. The first two focus on sins of drinking too much. That's not a problem for anyone in Wisconsin. The second two focus on sexual sins, but that's not a problem in the present time. The third two focus on relationships with others, but we never have to worry about dissension or being jealous of others, no. This is not a list for analyzation, this is a list for avoidation. This is not a list for my self-righteousness, where I say, "Lord I thank you that I am not like all those bad people who do all these terrible deeds of darkness." No! This is a list for me to see how easily the darkness of sin overwhelms my heart.

This is a list that helps me see what is so much, so much better. To be clothed with the Lord Jesus Christ. I know that our translation says, "Clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ." And I won't argue with that. But first, let's look at what this clothing is. This clothing is a perfect robe of righteousness. That's something only God can give. Robes cover you up, so no one can see how you really look underneath. Christ's righteousness completely covers us, so no one can see, not even God can see, our sin underneath. All God chooses to see is the perfection of Christ. Wow! Isn't that amazing! God doesn't see our sins, because our sins are completely covered by Christ. All God chooses to see is the holiness Christ won for us. So that's what that clothing is: the righteousness, holiness, perfection that Jesus gives us. Well, how do we get this clothing? We did nothing for it! Christ gave it to us in baptism. It's a free gift. You don't have to do this, but it is pretty cool when a person being baptism has on a white gown, brand new, white clothes, showing how white and pure and holy the baptized person is to God. Maybe it's even a baptismal garment that has been in the family for generations, showing how the Christian faith has been passed from parent to child for generations. If it's a child being baptized, this child can't dress himself. Someone else has to do that, showing God has to put these clothes on us. So this clothing is a

gift from God. How we got this clothing is a gift from God.

And yet, we still need to remember to put this clothing on, every day. Or more than once a day. A wise Christian once told me. "I used to think if I read my Bible and said my prayers in the morning, I was good for the day. Man, was I wrong. The devil still tempted me later in the day. I still sinned. I need to keep going back to God's Word, keep asking God for help, many, many times a day." We need to keep on going back to God's Word, putting on that baptismal gown. We need to keep on asking God for help and wear the armor of light he provides.

Who would dream of being given a brand new, Armani suit and then going out and rolling around in the mud? So who would imagine being given this perfect robe of perfect holiness that God provides and then going out and thinking about how to soil that garment by gratifying the desires of the sinful nature? Well, let's be honest. We all do. That final phrase says, "Don't even think about it!" But we do think about it. Don't make provision for your sinful nature and its desires. Really, there's no pro-vision, because the sinful flesh only looks at the moment and tries to fulfill a temporary desire in this present, evil time. I've got a designated driver. I don't have to work tomorrow. It's not hurting anyone. No one will find out. My friends, those are the old, ratty shirts of the sinful nature.

God has given you something so much better to wear: the Lord Jesus Christ. God has given you holiness and covered all your sins. God has placed perfection on your heart and on your soul. God baptized you to place his holiness all over you. Live out that holiness. Wear that righteousness. Clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.