

Advent 1

Isaiah 2:1-5

Romans 13:11-14

Matthew 24:36-44

Psalm 122

Welcome to the first week of Advent. This means there are four Sundays before Christmas! I love this time of year. I love the music, the decorations, the joy, the worship services; it's all great. Too bad it's so short. But maybe that's also what makes it special – we have a lot to pack into a small season.

How would you like your Advent season be this year? Are you considering having a more peaceful December? If so, this message is for you; and, not only the message, but the Bible readings too. You see, way back when, Advent was a mini-Lent. It was a time for the follower of Christ to take stock of their life, make changes as necessary, and, after four-weeks, have one's life renewed and refreshed just in time for the Nativity of our Savior. Consider it a Christmas gift to Jesus – to make changes in one's life to be more like Him who was born for us.

I find it interesting that what used to be a time of reflection and pondering – taking time for one's inner spiritual nature – has now become one of the most rushed and stressful times of year. Perhaps more than ever, now is the time to reflect on one's spiritual life.

We started this season with a short reading from Paul's letter to the Romans. Reading Romans, for me, is like staring at a cheesecake from Costco. It's tasty but way too big to eat in one, or five sittings. So, let's take a small slice from Romans; and, like my grandmother, who would ask for a small slice and then cut it in half, we'll take an even smaller slice in this message to make it easy to digest and understand. Here is the half-slice, I mean, passage:

Let us lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

The verb, “to lay aside” and “to put on” are simple, everyday verbs. To lay aside one's bathrobe and put on one's clothes for the day. It's a daily practice that we all do – change from night clothes to day clothes. Paul is using that action to invite (not command) us to lay aside – to remove – the “works of darkness” and to put on “the armor of light.”

At first read, “the works of darkness” sound like horror movie stuff. But that's not what Paul was talking about. He describes the “work of darkness” as follows:

Reveling, drunkenness, debauchery, licentiousness, quarreling and jealousy.

Apparently, in the first century, the party was happening in Rome! But, for us, I'd like to focus on the last two works-of-darkness: *quarreling and jealousy*. Arguing and envy.

What is it about the holidays that makes us get into more arguments and fall into the trap of envy? Perhaps this is why we started this season with this reading. I had never thought of works-of-darkness being quarreling and jealousy but, on reflection, it makes sense – light, joy, peace, love, faith and hope cannot come from quarreling and jealousy (never has; never will). Division and more envy come from arguing and envy; not light. Paul is inviting us to lay aside quarreling and jealousy and to put on the armor of light.

Paul writes about the “armor of light” and then, in the next sentence, invites us “to put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Like putting on a coat, we are to wear our Lord Jesus Christ out in the world. By wearing our Lord, we are also putting on the Armor of Light. So, how do we do that?

I brought three items to show-and-tell today. The first is my favorite Christmas sweater. It’s red, 100% cashmere, V-necked and makes me feel warm and joyful whenever I wear it. I only wear it in this season, and I plan to put it on for our upcoming Christmas Tea. It was a gift – it came from my friend and parishioner, Jan Webb; it was her husband’s. So, when I wear this sweater at All Angels, I know that I am not the first to do so. All of that makes me happy.

Speaking of happiness, when I wear my red sweater, I always get compliments. Some people, out of the blue, will walk up to me and touch me on the shoulder just to feel the sweater (or, I’d like to think it’s just to feel the sweater). The Christmas sweater is a visible sign, and it gives me joy.

The second item is my sunglasses. To be specific, these are my driving sunglasses. In Florida, we don’t just have one pair – we have glasses for many different activities, boating, fishing, gardening, golf, driving, and probably others I have not yet discovered. These are driving glasses. I can wear them all day without feeling fatigue. They got Elijah and me back home from a multi-day car trip from California. I love the glasses because they filter out the harsh light of driving but allow enough light in to read street signs and the like. And again, they’re comfortable for all day wearing. My fishing sunglasses are really good at looking through shimmering water to see the bottom, and hopefully fish. But they’re heavy and I cannot wear them all day. And, for driving, they block out too much light. So, when you see me wearing these blue glasses, you’ll know I’m driving.

The last item is my labor hat. [Hang on, there’s a reason why I’m telling you all this and it’ll make sense soon.] It’s a white ball cap with a Polo figure on the front. I wear this hat to work in the yard, on the car, and on the boat. It’s not my boating hat and it’s not a fishing hat – those are different. I also wear this hat to work out. I wash it all the time. It’s white so I can bleach it too. Somehow, I got carbon degreaser for my outboard motor on it; and look, it’s clean now! When I’m wearing this hat, you know I’m doing some sort of work outside.

Ready to hear how this all fits into wearing the Lord Jesus Christ?

Let me start with the hat. The Lord is metaphorically described as shield and protector. In particular, *the Lord is your shade from the sun at noonday and will protect you from the brightness of the moon.* (Psalm 121:5-6) I wear this hat to work outside because my head needs protection from the sun. It makes shade for me whenever I wear it.

Putting on the armor of light, putting on our Lord Jesus Christ is putting the grace of God over my head to protect me from the harshness of life, to give me shade – the forgiveness and the mercy of God that protects me every day. Paul reminds us in Ephesians to put on the “helmet of salvation”; for me, that’s like putting on this hat – I am blocked from the harshness of life and given shade thanks to the grace of God. So, daily, I am to put on the Lord Jesus Christ like wearing this hat to protect me.

The sunglasses are a metaphor for seeing people through the lens of the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as the sunglasses block out the harshness of light (that makes me squint), looking at others through the sunglasses of Christ means that I look at people with compassion and mercy and love. Sunglasses are a part of the metaphorical Armor of Light because it helps me to look at others the way that Christ sees them – for who they are as loved and beloved children and not in the harshness of the unfiltered light of day.

I wear the sweater as a Comforter (the Holy Spirit) and a mantle around my shoulders. To put on the Armor of Light, to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, is a daily invitation for the Holy Spirit to be like a bright red sweater that brings me warm and comfort. ... don’t leave home without it!

Wearing the hat that gives me shade, looking at others with the lens of Christ, and the comfort of the Holy Spirit is one metaphorical way of looking at the Armor of Light which repels, lays-aside, the works of quarreling and jealousy. And, just like the white hat, the blue sunglasses and the red sweater, putting on the Lord Jesus Christ is visible to others. The Armor of Light helps others to lay aside arguments and envy. It helps them to lay aside the works of darkness – quarreling and jealousy – and to put on the Armor of Light.

I invite you over the next four weeks leading up to Christmas to ponder what laying aside the works of quarreling and jealousy would look like for you. What would putting on the Armor of Light, the Lord Jesus Christ, look like for you? What would it look like for others. If you ponder and then lay-aside and put-on, it will be a peaceful and joyous season as we prepare for the Nativity of our Lord.