

## ***“Put on” Christ***

Meditation on Romans 13:11-14

First Sunday in Advent, Merritt Island Presbyterian Church

Nov. 27, 2016

*“Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then 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 immorality and shamelessness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”*

Just two days before Thanksgiving, the girl with ringlets spilling out from underneath a black cap shook her head when asked if she had a celebration or prayer concern to share during circle time. Elly is one of the few quiet ones. Most children in Kids Klub are nearly bursting to share about their chickens and bunnies, dogs and cats, loose or lost teeth and getting braces, having birthdays and family vacations, trips to grandma’s, good grades and college-age siblings coming home for the holidays. They request prayer for brothers and sisters, parents, grandparents, and friends who are sick and healing for their own colds, stomach bugs and scrapes and sprains from falling off monkey bars and bicycles. On Tuesday, after children had shared their celebrations and concerns in our circle time, I was amazed when 7 of them volunteered to lead the prayer for the group! Their prayers were simple and brief, but came straight from the heart.

Dress rehearsal for their Christmas program is Friday afternoon, but some of the kids have been wearing cowboy hats and boots and practicing their “Western” accents since August, when they began rehearsing for “The Loaned Manger.” Putting on the costumes--dressing up like characters in the Old West-- helps them learn their parts **and** brings them joy. They draw confidence to be someone they haven’t been before. *Someone new.* At the same time, they are encouraged to be themselves-- their best possible selves. But when the costume goes on, they must let go of fear, anxiety and doubt and trust that others will love and accept them as they are--and not ridicule or reject them. In this creative, affirming, *Christ*-centered environment, I have seen the children bloom and grow.

\*\*\*

Paul’s language in the first two verses of today’s passage in Romans-- the imagery of a person waking in the morning and getting dressed, putting on the “armor of light” or “weapons of light,” as some translations say--comes from an early Christian hymn. The Christian must prepare for battle, just as naturally and routinely as we get dressed every morning to prepare for the weather and activities of the day. The battle is not with other people; it is a spiritual battle with our own “flesh” and temptation to sin. What *we put on* is for our protection and strength--overcoming evil with good, as Paul says in 12:21. What *we put on* helps bring about the inner transformation needed to change our sinful behaviors. Paul tells us in his own words in verse 14 that the “armor of light” is, in fact, Jesus Christ. When Paul says “salvation is

nearer to us now than when we became believers,” he wants us to live as if the Kingdom of God--a glimpse of which we have when we celebrate communion-- has **already come** to fruition. The “day” that is “near” that Paul speaks of is not just the day of Christ’s return as he promised but the new era that dawned with the cross and resurrection. The age of Adam and the fall of human beings is the “night” that is “far gone.” The age of Redemption is here--when sinners are saved by grace and no longer live for themselves, as Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:15, “but for him who died for them and was raised again.” And, again, in Romans 14:7-8, “We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.”

But like those who are sleeping, we may not be aware of what is going on in the spiritual realm. The Holy season of Advent falls in one of the busiest and most stressful times of the year. TV commercials tell us we need to spend, spend, spend! We need expensive cars and bigger TVs; the good news is that Black Friday sales are extended till the end of the month! Some people are making lists and muttering to themselves, “I have shopping to do. Presents to wrap. Cards to write. Cookies to bake. Holiday meals to make. A tree, house, and yard to decorate.” We might forget that now, more than ever, is the time when we cannot wear ordinary garments. We cannot live ordinary lives.

“Be not conformed to the world,” Paul tells us in Romans 12:2. *Choose* transformation by the renewing of our minds. It doesn’t just happen. We don’t have to give in to what the world demands of us. We choose to discern *the will of God*--“what is good and acceptable and perfect,” Paul

says, and we choose to obey, as we promise in the prayer Jesus taught us, “Thy will be done.”

Paul’s teachings are not just for this church in Rome that he hadn’t yet visited, a church he wanted to support him in a new mission to Spain; it is for the Body of Christ, who are “many,” he says in Romans 12:5-6, with different gifts “according to (God’s) grace...” He urges **unity** for Jew and Gentile believers, who often did not agree on how Christians should live. The important thing was to not do or say things that would cause another brother or sister to “stumble” in their walk of faith. Paul writes in Romans 14:17, “For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but **righteousness and peace and joy** in the Holy Spirit.” “Live in **harmony** with one another,” he says in 12:16. In 12:18, “If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live **peaceably with all.**”

After quoting from the early Christian hymn and reminding us to be clothed in Christ in our war against sin, Paul says, “Let us live honorably as in the day, not in...” and he lists certain sins that are “works of darkness” that must first be put off before putting on the “armor of light”-- *Jesus Christ*. William Barclay (*The Letter to the Romans*, p. 210-211) has this to say about the sins... **Reveling or revelry** (*komos*) was “originally the band of friends who accompanied a victor home from the games, singing his praises and celebrating his triumph.” Later, it came to mean a noisy band of no-goods creating havoc in the city streets at night. **Drunkenness** (*methe*) “was a particularly disgraceful thing to the Greeks,” surprisingly, since they were “a wine-drinking people. Even children drank wine.” Breakfast was a piece of bread dipped in wine. But the wine was diluted and drunk because “the water supply was

inadequate and dangerous.” **Immorality** (koite) means literally “a bed” and “has in its meaning the desire for a forbidden bed.” **Shamelessness** (*aselgeia*) describes those who are not only immoral; they don’t care who sees them doing their evil deeds or what people think. The last two sins, given their position at the end of the sentence, are the ones of which Paul is most concerned for the Body. The sin of **contention or quarreling** (eris) “comes from a desire for place, power and prestige and from the hatred of being bettered. It is essentially the sin which places self in the foreground and is the entire negation of Christian love.” Jealousy (**zelos**) “describes the spirit which cannot be content with what it has and looks with jealous eye on every blessing given to someone else and denied to itself.”

For Paul, love is the most important thing. In Romans 12:9-10, he says, “Let **love** be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; **love** one another with mutual affection.” And in the three verses that precede today’s reading, Paul writes, “Owe no one anything, except to **love one another**; for the one who **loves another** has fulfilled the law...” He names several Commandments, before concluding the sum of which are, “**Love your neighbor** as yourself.” He adds to Jesus’ teaching on the Greatest Commandment, “**Love does no wrong** to a neighbor; therefore, **love** is the fulfilling of the law.”

Friends, now more than ever, in this season of hoping and waiting for our Savior, but also too much busyness and materialism, we cannot wear ordinary garments. We cannot live ordinary lives. *Choose* to be transformed! Cast off fear and doubt and other sins that get in the way of healthy change in our lives as individuals and in our life of faith

together. Love one another. Accept one another. Live in peace. Put on the armor of light. Put on Jesus Christ.

\*\*\*

I want to make sure you know that Kids Klub isn't just about preparing children to put on a Bible show twice a year. It's about love and acceptance. Elly is only 5--and one of the youngest children in our afterschool program. She came because a friend invited her. When her grandma picked her up at the end of the first class, she started to cry--and I was worried that something had happened that first day. I went over to comfort her. But her grandma assured me that nothing bad had happened. She was crying because she didn't want to leave.

But why does she always wear her black hat? her grandmother asked. She tells her to take it off when she is inside for respect. I think Elly wears it to be like the others in their cowboy hats--and putting on the "costume" gives her confidence to be someone she hasn't been before. *Someone new*. But also the best possible self she can be--if she can cast off fear and doubt and trust that she will be loved and accepted for who she is.

On Saturday, I hope you will come and support the children as they share the love of Jesus with the community through drama, movement and music, such as this beautiful song by Rob Howard: "Everlasting Light." *For God so loved the world that he gave his only son and if we believe in him we will have life everlasting. Life everlasting. Jesus, everlasting light, shine through my darkness with hope so bright. Jesus, everlasting light, shine through my darkness tonight. I am the light of the*

*world. He that follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. The light of life.*

*Let us pray...*

Holy one, thank you for sending Jesus to be the light of the world, shining in our darkness. Help us, Lord, to let go of the sins that keep us from being our best selves or even someone altogether new, if you lead us. Stir us to remember each day when we get up and get dressed, that we also need to pray and put on the armor of light. We need to put on Jesus Christ! Lead us to be not conformed to the world during this Holy season of Advent and not feel the pressure to keep up with everyone else in our spending and doing. Teach us to love one another, Lord, and to live in peace. And we seek a blessing of joy for the children, staff and faithful volunteers of Kids Klub as they prepare to shine your light to the families, community and congregation. Keep them all healthy and safe. Help them learn their lines and songs and to remember always the love and grace of Jesus Christ. In His name we pray. Amen.