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 Plymouth Congregational Church, United Church of Christ in Fort Collins, Colorado
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 Romans 13: 8-13 Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost: *Christian Dreamers*

[Silence from Pulpit looking out at the congregation.]

Have you ever had the feeling [PAUSE] that there was **so much** (so much 2x) you **MUST** say to someone that you couldn't even start to speak? Today is one of those days for me as a young pastor. There is so much to say this morning and so much need for sacred, **indignant** Christianity in the face of Empire. But there is also a need for comfort and God's assurance that All Shall be Well again... eventually in God's Realm of Love and God's Providence/ God's dream for us as co-inhabitants of this finite planet and finite, mortal lives.

It appears to me, and many scholars, that the Apostle Paul, the author of this letter to the Christian community in Rome from the lectionary for today, was in a similar situation as a preacher. He had so many concerns and so little time to try to say it all to the communities he was leading. This means that Paul, in the midst of so much to say, sometimes contradicts himself, but today's reading from Romans 13 seems to be Paul breaking free from systemic gridlock, confusion, logistics, and institutional minutia into a moment of absolute ethical clarity.

We imagine Paul saying to himself, "Yes, this must be said to Rome, forget about disagreements about laws, antiquated and complicated and contradictory as they are. Rather, refocus on Love (agape)." Like Paul, today, let's get back to the basics: "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law." All of the commandments, "are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to neighbor; therefore, love is fulfilling of the law."

As I humbly attempt to channel a bit of Paul's predicament and also clarity from Romans this morning, I covet you for your prayers. Pray with me? May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be good and pleasing to you, O God, our Rock, Our Sustainer, and Our Dreamer. Amen.

Hurricanes (plural) made of wind and rain and hurricanes of bad policy that puts old law before young people, protectionism before those who most need protection, a political base before the basic ethics of Christian faith. Bombs tested this week both in the arena of diplomacy and international relations with North Korea and in the middle of the living rooms, educations, and the personal lives of DACA/ Dreamer residents of this country—our neighbors. Where is God? Is God also on a golfing vacation somewhere in New Jersey?

This is a question that the Romans and the other early Christian communities also probably ask themselves—well except without the New Jersey part. Where is God? Verse 12 says, "the night is far gone, the day is near." Paul is writing to a community of

Christians he has never visited in person, and he is trying to share with them the dream of Christian hope, a law of love, and a sense of where God is in the midst of persecutions, hiding, and life threatening potential conflict. Because the letter to the Romans is written without much specific familiarity, it is Paul's most comprehensive letter with the biggest vision for what Christianity is all about. Paul, like his contemporaries, saw his time, as some of us see our own here and now with conflict, persecutions, and global climate change, as apocalyptic in one form or another—a time of great change and crisis.

Scholars agree that this chapter from Romans, while filled with a deep sense of love for neighbor (which means the whole world... all people and not just a literal neighbor) is rooted in the genre of apocalyptic literature and a feeling of urgency, fear, and a sense of God's Realm being the dawning of a new day...like tomorrow or now. So next time you hear this Romans passage being used in a wedding, I want you to chuckle to yourself and remember it is an apocalyptic text being used for that wedding! ☺

While the immediate reality around them was grim, the call of Christianity from this letter onward has been to be the Dreamers for a better world that goes beyond borders, nationalities, and politics. Christians are called to be dreamers for a world beyond violence, deportations, and cold hard expediency or literal law. This is what Augustine wrote in *The City of God*. Christ calls us to post-boarders, citizens of God's realm of Love, to be Dreamers and enactors of a world of Holy Love for all.

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We are, in many ways, on this Sunday of setbacks and contradictions, wars and rumors of wars, weapons of unimaginable destruction, and deportations (separating of families and friends in the name of law and order)...kindred Christians with Paul's community in Rome. We feel the need for a new day. We are on the brink of something new. Paul is writing to and for us. Additionally, like Paul's Christians, we know that after us Christianity will never be the same. What will be left of our legacy?

Today, therefore, is the day to ask this question: What is the core, fundamental, **back-to-basics** dream of Christian faith? Let's get back to basics. For Paul, the law doesn't go away and still has value, but it is summarized first and foremost by a focus on striving to love and take care of one another.

The dreamers we are called to be for God's world of love are threatened by unholy temptations to turn inward! Vestiges of Theological Education, remnants of denominational infrastructure, and catastrophic shifts in institutional function and arrangements threaten to take all of our attention as Christians to save what was and has been rather than dream of what could be. Some want us to dream of yesterday of before everything went wrong, **but that is nostalgia not a dream**. Nostalgia in national politics and in church culture doesn't lead to love-in-action. Christianity is the faith of the

dreamers for God's realm of now and tomorrow not the faith of nostalgia for a past that never really was.

To dream is what God does and it is something that comes for the future. When we release ourselves from the bonds of conflict and false prophets of nostalgia and open ourselves-up to love, then we are Christian Dreamers with God.

Does being dreamers for a world of love mean that we are inactive or passive observers?

Verse 11 and following: "Besides this, **you know what time it is**, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep...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 reveling and drunkenness, debauchery and licentiousness... NOT in quarreling and jealousy."

This week, veiled in confusing tweets and promises, those who were brought to the United States as children, raised as friends and patriots here, educated, invested, loved here as their home and country were told that they are no longer safe, no longer neighbors, no longer able to dream. You have heard of un-friending like on Facebook? [Ask for a show of hands.] This action is un-neighboring of 800,000 beloved and their families. DACA or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals recipients, also known as dreamers, are the subject of Romans 13 today! You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep!

As Christians, we also claim full solidarity with the dreamers being un-neighbored by policies of false nostalgia and false promises. **As Christians, borders and political excuses don't limit our ancient faith and ancestral calling.** God's dream is too big for that. You know what time it is! I am not going to leave you guessing today. **God is a DACA recipient. God is a dreamer.** Where is God? **That is where God is—sleeping in a cold deportation center cell in Aurora.**

God doesn't need more lawyers debating God's intent. Love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to neighbor. God is the one in our midst who looks like a neighbor or a childhood arrival immigrant working for a better future in education, community, and hope. This is how we live honorably as in the day of love rather than in the night of quarreling and jealousy—we work for justice and hope for DACA recipients. Only by showing love of neighbor in real ways can we wake from sleep and live-into the dreamer status we are called to embrace... to become Christian Dreamers (ALL) as God intends for us.

You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep! In responding to the needs of DACA recipients, supporting them in following their dreams, recognizing their contribution, and standing in solidarity in these days of uncertainty... we love our neighbor as ourselves.

You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep!

In giving to the victims of Harvey and Irma and by advocating for policies that will protect God's beloved planet and people from further climate change and devastation... we love our neighbors as ourselves.

You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep! In our prayers and voices advocating for diplomacy and de-escalation rather than war and destructions, bomb tests, and global anxiety. By advocating for peace for the planet, we love our neighbors as ourselves.

You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep! It is time for love. It is time to be dreamers with the DACA Dreamers for a better world and a better tomorrow. It is time to dream a new world into bring.

Yes, we are dreamers called by God as Christians to imagine a better world, **but that doesn't mean that we are asleep to the needs in our midst.** We are dreamers—visionaries for a world rooted in love.

Like Paul, we live in a changing and dangerous world that often seems apocalyptic. Often we get bogged down in politics and church nostalgia, but today we go back to basics... to love and to dream a dream for a new world.

You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep! The dreaming has only just begun. Amen.