

Wake Up!
Romans 13:11-14
John Breon

Advent is about time and awareness.

Paul says, "And do this, understanding the present time." We might ask, "And do *what?*" The answer is in what Paul wrote prior to the verses we're reading. The context for what Paul writes at the end of chapter 13 is all that he wrote in chapters 12 and 13. Paul encourages the Roman Christians to offer themselves to God, to function as members of Christ's body according to the gifts God gives, to be sincere in love, to respect governmental authority in its role of keeping order, and to love one another. He says that all the commandments can be summed up in "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love fulfills the law. So we're to love, understanding the present time.

Time is important to us. We each have the same amount of time. We can spend time, pass time, waste time, kill time, and tell time. Victor Borge once told a friend that he could tell time by his piano. The friend didn't believe him, so Borge began pounding out a loud march on the piano. From the next apartment came a pounding on the wall and a shrill voice shouting, "Stop that noise! Don't you know it's 1:30 in the morning?"

That's not the kind of time Paul calls us to understand and be aware of. The word for time here is *kairos*, which is a special moment and not just clock time or calendar time. *Kairos* means opportune time, fulfilled time. It's the moment of God's purpose and action. The present time Paul mentions is the fullness of time when God sent his Son into the world (Galatians 4:4).

Because God came in Jesus Christ, because God continues to come in each moment and because Christ will come again in final fulfillment of his purpose, the hour has come for us to wake up. The old age, the old era is passing away and a new day is dawning in Jesus Christ. We need to be up and about before the new day breaks fully.

Imagine if you were from London and were visiting here. London is six hours ahead of our time zone. If you had an office in London and you needed to talk to the people there at 8:00 a.m., you'd need to be up at 2:00

a.m. here. We work and live now aware that God's new time is coming. We anticipate what is to come. Because of what God has done in Christ and because of what is yet to come, it's time to wake up.

For some folks, waking up and getting an early start on the day is easy. I remember spending the night with my grandparents. They got up very early. I would wake up to the sounds and smells of my grandmother cooking breakfast. My grandfather would be in his chair, waiting for the morning paper to be delivered. Now, they also went to bed much earlier than many people as well.

When I was in school, sometimes on winter evenings we would get the news that, because of snow, there would be no school the next day. I could stay up late and sleep in the next morning. But on some of those mornings, Dad came into my room, woke me up and said he needed me to go clear the sidewalks at the Senior Citizens apartment complex. Dad was on their board and he was responsible for maintenance and such. So I would drag out of bed, call some friends, and go shovel snow all morning.

Now, getting up and out of bed on Christmas morning was another story. I'm not sure what was the earliest we got up when I was a kid, but it seems like one time we were up around 4:30—a.m.! It's easy to wake up when there's excitement and anticipation.

That's the kind of waking up Paul calls for—with excitement and anticipation because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. That sounds a little strange to us who are used to talking about being saved in the past tense: "I have been saved." But the New Testament speaks of salvation in past, present and future tenses. We can say, "I have been saved. I am being saved. I will be saved." Romans 13:11 is one instance of salvation's future tense. That future salvation is the fulfillment, the completion, of the salvation that God began in Christ and continues to work in us day by day when we're in Christ through faith. When Jesus appears again, he will complete our salvation. We're to wake up to the salvation and new life God offers and that God will fulfill at Jesus' second advent.

Someone told me recently about how his wife likes to take in cats. They once got a kitten that was just a few weeks old. It didn't look like it

would survive. The kitten seemed lifeless, but the woman held it and stroked it. It seemed hopeless. But then the man shouted at the cat, "Wake up and live!" And it opened its eyes, got up and started walking around. They still have that cat.

If it works for a cat, what about for a person? Can you hear in your spirit God's voice saying, "Wake up and live"? Paul is saying, "Wake up and live new life in Christ."

Paul compares the coming of Jesus to the dawning of a new day. This present age that's characterized by sin and rebellion against God is like nighttime. The return of Christ to consummate God's kingdom in the age to come is a bright shining day. The incarnation, death and, especially, the resurrection of Jesus give us the first rays of the light of that new day. The light of the coming age is already shining into the darkness of the present. In Christ, we are people of the light and children of the day. Therefore, Paul says, put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

He lists some of the deeds of darkness. These are similar to the "works of the flesh" he discusses elsewhere. "Flesh" in those passages refers to weak human nature that's infected by sin. It's not just our body, but it includes our spirit, attitudes, and thoughts. Paul encouraged the early Christians to stop taking part in the pagan lifestyles they once were part of and that their neighbors still practiced. We're called not to be shaped by our culture and society, not to let the world around us squeeze us into its mold. Instead, we're to be transformed by the renewing of our mind (Romans 12:2). We're to be shaped by God's kingdom, to live in light of the coming day of God's glory.

Paul summarizes in the last verse: "Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ." We put off the deeds of darkness, the works of the flesh, and put on Christ in baptism (see Galatians 3:27). But what happened in baptism also always happens anew. Our entire Christian life involves putting off all that belongs to the old age and putting on all that belongs to God's new time.

We no longer cater to the flesh—that is, human nature apart from God. Instead we clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. This simple image of getting up in the morning and getting dressed is a metaphor for a

profound spiritual reality. It reminds us that the life of faith is a life of discipleship. We intentionally follow Jesus in the most common and practical matters. "Discipleship is following Jesus step by step in the direction he leads" (James Edwards, *Romans, New International Biblical Commentary*).

Christian life is *in Christ*. We live in Christ. We walk in Christ. The Lord is our environment, the air we breathe, the reality that shapes us. That's how we "behave decently, or, walk honorably, as in the daytime." Every day, we put off the old life and all that goes with it and we put on Christ. We make a conscious decision to trust him and commit ourselves to him. Step by step we walk in him until he appears again with all his glory.

Randy Foust was the youth director at the church where I was an associate pastor. He told a story about his unusual experience of Christmas one year. In 1982 Randy was living in Denver, a long way from his family in Topeka, KS. His parents had divorced that year, and it would be their first Christmas as a "broken family." As the oldest child, Randy felt responsible to be home for what was sure to be a difficult holiday.

He was sharing an apartment with his sister in Denver. Her part-time job allowed her to get time off and leave for Topeka several days early. Randy was a regional manager for a fast-food chain and wouldn't have any time off. It didn't look like he would be able to go home at all. It would be the first Christmas that his family wouldn't be together.

Then, at the first of December, the company announced a sales contest. The winner would get an extra week of vacation, starting at Christmas. Randy worked hard, putting in three solid weeks of 18-20 hour days. And he won the contest. But he didn't find out that he had won until December 23. His sister had already left for home. He finally got an airline ticket to fly out of Denver at 4:00 p.m. on Christmas Eve. He would get home just in time for Christmas.

He worked late into the night on the twenty-third, finally leaving the office at 2:30 the morning of the twenty-fourth. A light snow began to fall. He thought, "How nice. Denver is going to have a white Christmas."

He slept in till 10:00 that morning, planning to eat a bit and head out to the airport early. But when he opened the door to get the morning

paper, he found that the light snowfall had turned into a blizzard. Snow was already waist deep. Altogether it snowed 48 inches.

The airport was closed and the city was paralyzed. Randy couldn't get out of his apartment. He was so sad as he thought about spending Christmas in his apartment all alone. He moped around all day, feeling sorry for himself in the empty apartment that felt so cold.

Then one of his store managers called. No one had closed the stores early during the blizzard. Employees were stranded in six different restaurants. They were snowed in with no way home. It was early evening on Christmas Eve and they were resigned to spending Christmas stuck in the restaurants. Suddenly Randy's plight didn't look so bad after all. At least he was home and could sleep in his own bed, not on the cold hard floor of a dining room.

As he thought about those employees, he felt that he was closer to home than they were, even though he was so far away from his family. There was no telling how long it would be before they could get out since the city was completely shut down. Randy tried to distract himself by watching TV, but he couldn't get those stranded employees off his mind. He called his supervisor who didn't seem concerned.

Then Randy started calling the stores, trying to encourage the stranded employees. During one of those calls, he was interrupted by a noise outside. He hung up and went to the window to see what was making the noise. There in the middle of the apartment courtyard were several guys on snowmobiles. Seeing them gave Randy an idea.

He had to break through a storm window to get outside and he landed in snow almost up to his neck. It turned out that a member of a snowmobile club lived in the apartment complex. Randy explained the situation and they were glad to get some more members and go on a rescue mission for the stranded kids. Randy jumped on the back of a snowmobile and away they went.

It took all night. Even with the snowmobiles, travel was slow and difficult. They ran into huge drifts and gas shortages and the weather was very cold. But seeing those faces light up at the prospect of going home was worth it.

Randy says he got home at 4:00 in the morning. His apartment was just as empty and even colder than when he left (he forgot about the open window). But he felt so much better, knowing that he'd found a purpose in being there—to be the way home for so many others.

Isn't that what Christmas is about? Christ coming on a rescue mission to deliver us and to be the way home to the Father for us.

May this Advent be a time for us to wake up and live, to wake up and walk on with the Lord Jesus Christ who leads us home.