

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹¹Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep.
(Romans 13:11)

All three of this morning's Bible readings concern the coming day of the Lord. For each of us, the day is approaching when we shall have to deal with God, face to face. Likewise, this old world's cities, nations, economies, and courts shall have to deal with our Maker. The day of the Lord is approaching, of that the Bible is certain, and perhaps the Day is fast approaching. We do not exactly when the Day is coming, but the logic of our Gospel reading is inescapable:

...if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into.

⁴⁴Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you *do not* expect.

We do not know when the day of the Lord is coming, and *therefore* we ought to live each day as if it is worthy of being the day of our Lord's return.

St. Paul's particular way of phrasing the matter is quite interesting. He urges that if we would be ready for the Day of the Lord, we should wake up. Notice that this is a pastoral and brotherly exhortation. The apostle is addressing Christians — not the world in general, but the Christians who live and worship in Rome. He imagines that they sleepwalk: they do this and they do that, but with hardly any mind in the matter. Or rather, they do this and they do that, but with hardly any of the Spirit of Christ in them. Christians! He is speaking to Christians and urging them to wake up. Already, early in Church history, in those glorious days within a generation of the earthly ministry of Jesus, there were somnolent saints. There were Christians who trudged through the day with sleepy minds and sleepy hearts. St. Paul means to stir them up.

Paul offers two strategies for spiritual awakening. And I will offer a third. In fact, let me

begin with my idea, since it is humble and nothing special and we can easily deal with it before moving on to the more profound teaching of the apostle.

My idea is simply this: You are spiritually sleepy because you are physically sleepy. So, get some rest! Remember the proverb: early to bed, early to rise, makes one healthy, wealthy, and wise. Well, it makes us wealthier in spiritual matters too. I mean, it is hard to pray, when you keep nodding off. Get some more sleep.

I do not mean to criticize you for your fatigue, for I share it with you. Rather, I am trying to draw out something of the extent of our exhaustion. You are part of a hardworking city and part of a generation of extraordinary laborers. Your grandparents have little on you when it comes to work. Yet some of our weariness is our own fault. It sounds odd to say it, but I think that many of us should *work harder* at *getting some rest*. Late night television has the ability to obscure our fatigue. Brooding over the eleven o'clock news is not good for our health. If only we would go to bed, say the Our Father, trust the world over to God, turn off the light, and close our eyes, we would soon find strengthening sleeping washing over us. But if we live as if we are owls, alert and ready to fight in the nighttime, then we shall find ourselves dull-minded and dull-spirited when the sun is rising and the alarm is going off.

There are differences among us, I realize, when it comes to the amount of rest we need. Jesus, for example, seems to have been able to spend the night in prayer:

And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone. (Matthew 14:23)

He could do this, and remain sweet-spirited in the daylight hours. But if we stay awake in the

nighttime hours, only to find ourselves grouchy in the morning, then we should get some more sleep.

Again, it is hard to be spiritual when we are nodding off. Our text teaches that it is “high time” to awake from sleep:

And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.(Romans 13:11, KJV)

For some of us, waking from sleep means get some more rest in this world.

So, that’s that. Let’s move on to the more elegant apostolic preaching. First off, St. Paul urges us to wake up by withdrawing from vice:

¹³let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy.(Romans 13:13)

Have you ever come to church drunk on a Sunday morning? I hope so. Err... I mean, I hope you come to church! even if you are drunk. Better that than missing the Sabbath day.

Better still is it to not get drunk! Drunkenness, debauchery, licentiousness: these things drag down the spirit. How can our hearts incline heavenward if we are bedding down with anyone willing? How can we think sublime thoughts of God if we are so drugged with pot or vodka that we can’t think two thoughts straight anyway? How can we imagine ourselves to be living examples of Christian freedom if we imagine ourselves to be prisoners of whatever disordered impulses we happen to have in our heads or have inherited from our genetic background? Remember Luther’s great words from his treatise on “The Freedom of a Christian”:

A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.

A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.

How are you going to be either one — either a perfectly free lord or a perfectly dutiful servant — if you are sleepwalking, somnolent, and hypnotized by participation in vices unworthy of a Christian?

But these things are negative: avoid vice, flee drunkenness, break with licentiousness. But Paul reaches the pinnacle of his exhortation with his beautifully positive point:

¹⁴But put on the Lord Jesus Christ...

Like a daily garment, like Master Jack putting on his coat, as Luther once put it, let Christ be our daily garment. Let him be the image toward which we would grow. Let him be our notion of our truest selves. Let us become Christlike... Christian!

Martin Luther illustrated what it means to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” with this simple story about a dying monk:

Once a monk was lying at the point of death. The other monks reminded him of his good works and merits, saying: “Bear in mind that you are a member of the Order of St. Francis, that you were a pious priest, that you diligently prayed your Psalter and read many Masses.” Then he picked up a crucifix, held it aloft, and replied: “Why should I put my trust in an order? This Man did everything. I know of no work and merit other than that of this Man.”⁹⁵ That monk had really understood this text. This is what one may call... putting on one’s baptismal robe, Christ. And thus the monk was saved.¹

Let us “put on” Christ. Let us strive to be Christlike. Then I do believe we will be found ready for the return of the Lord. Indeed, as the Lord returns, he will say to himself, “I find a people ready and waiting for me. Indeed, I find a race of people who resemble me, they are have been trying so hard to be ready for me. With them, I feel at home. And to them I give a home, even a heavenly mansion.”

To this returning Christ be the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

¹Luther, M. (1999, c1957). *Vol. 22: Luther’s works, vol. 22 : Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther’s Works (Jn 3:20). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.