

Theme: **Behold the Light, Putting on the Light**

Text: Romans 13:11 – 14

Season: 1st Wednesday Advent Service

Date: November 29, 2017

Place: Shepherd of the Rockies LCMS, Bailey, CO

Grace and peace to you, as you let the light of God be a part of your life, from God, our Father, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Through the years my family has enjoyed the adventurous routine of going out into the woods, or around on our property or to a tree farm, to cut down a pine tree to stand in our home as our Christmas tree for that year. As I think about all the years with and without the kids and now there have been countless memories of the aromas and the beautiful visions of the various trees we have had I give thanks to God for this time of the year. After hauling that perfect tree out of the woods, loading it in the vehicle and muscling it into the house there is still much more to do. There's putting it in the stand and straightening it this way and that way, then turning it and turning it again until you have the best-looking side to the front.

Once the positioning is accomplished, everyone steps back just to admire the aroma and the beauty of the tree, for at least a few moments. Then comes the time to put on the lights. It seems interesting that we look at the tree without lights and we see beauty – beauty that is shrouded by darkness. Then we anxiously put on the lights so we can see the real beauty of the tree and finish it with the ornaments. This is the routine that we have enjoyed doing so many times because it means that Christ is coming.

In one form or another, each of you and most Christians are going through this same routine during the Advent season. You, too, are preparing your home with lights and decorations and with a purpose: to celebrate Christ coming as the light of the world, to shine through the darkness of sin and death. Oh, there is much to get ready during this time of the year as we focus on Christ's coming to bring us hope, peace, joy and love, which are represented by the four candles on the Advent wreath.

The Apostle Paul, in our epistle lesson for tonight, is speaking about the routines that we use to prepare for Christ, the light of the world. However, the day for which the Apostle Paul is encouraging us to be prepared and be ready for is not Christmas. We don't need to prepare for that which has already happened, but rather for the day that is still to come. The Apostle Paul isn't concerned with trees, decoration or even our lights. Instead, he desires to

make sure each of us are prepared spiritually for Christ's second coming, just as the angels, Mary and Joseph were prepared for Christ's first coming as the baby who would be the Savior of the world. The Apostle Paul doesn't want us to continue standing in front of the unlit tree and admiring what we really don't want to see – darkness. Nor does he want us to be filled with terror and fright, but rather to be filled with joy and excitement, to be filled with hope of the transformation from this earthly life to the holy and everlasting life we will have in heaven. So, with the beginning of Advent we are reminded that we need to get prepared for the day that is to come, the day we are all hoping for. For this is the day that we need to be preparing for, the day when Christ comes in all His splendor, power and glory, with all the heavenly angels, banishing the darkness with His victorious light. Such anticipation is filled with the delight that God loves each and every one of us so much that He sent His Only Son, Jesus Christ, into this world of darkness to be our hope and light of eternal joy.

Unfortunately, too many people have become confused about God's genuine love for us. Quite often people believe and teach that God loves us because He has strong feelings or loving emotions toward His creation. It's true, feeling and emotions are involved in love, but the greatest part of love is the action. Love is an action that one does rather than what one feels. God's love is shown to us by His actions and not by our feelings.

Imagine if God the Father decided that His love for mankind had changed, the He fell out of love with mankind. Since our fall into sin, generation after generation have turned their back and sinned against God. Don't you think that God would get tired of loving us when we don't love Him back? Or, imagine Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, looking up into heaven and saying, "Father, I hate this feeling and I don't feel like going through all this suffering and death." The good news is that God's love doesn't change and Jesus resisted those feelings and fought back even though He prayed three times to have the cup of suffering removed. His love for us was demonstrated by His actions – dying on the cross, suffering hell, being buried in a grave for us – those actions shine and enlighten our lives as we strive to love one another as He has loved us. The Apostle Paul tells us, **"God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** (Rom. 5:8)

We are sinners and by nature we love the darkness. I'm sure that you will agree that nothing good happens in the darkness of this world. So many of the sins we get ourselves into happen in the dark, don't they? A time and a place where no one else can see them, that's

why the Apostle Paul encourages us to put away the works that need to be hidden by darkness and he tells us, **“Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy.”** (Rom 13:13)

Even as God’s dearly-loved children who have been called to be His own and set apart from the world, it is so difficult to live as we should, for the world of darkness bears a sense of beauty that charms and lures our sinful flesh to be captivated by its mystery. We are drawn to live in the darkness and avoid the true light of God’s Law and love.

Through God’s Law, we know our sinfulness. God’s love is the fulfillment of the Law in and through the birth of His Son, Jesus Christ, to be the Savior of all the nations. Jesus was born to pierce the darkness and under the darkness of that afternoon sky on Good Friday, Jesus did just that. Jesus’ death is the ultimate glorious light of God’s love. God’s love for us didn’t end when Jesus Christ died on the cross. His love continued to shine through Christ as He gave us His Holy Spirit, in His Word and Sacraments, to bring us the gift of saving faith. Faith that clings to the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ that covers our individual sinful lives and unites us as believers. As sinners who have received this righteousness of Christ, we live lives redeemed out of the darkness. This is not by anything we have done, but purely by God’s free and loving gift, which cleanses us from all our sins and enables us to love as He has first loved us. This is what we do, as those who have been called out of the darkness and into His marvelous light. We desire to follow in the way of Christ, obedient and loving, not out of fear but because of His love for us first.

Through God’s grace, we know we’ve been forgiven and empowered to live in the righteous life of Christ. It is in this grace that we are enabled to put on the armor of light so that we may openly and honestly love our neighbors. Truly, this armor of light is by far brighter and stronger than any light man can imagine, for it is the true light of Jesus Christ Himself. So, we put on Jesus Christ as our armor of light to protect us from the darkness of this world and the temptation of the devil. Strengthened, daily, by the power of Christ’s Word and Sacraments we live and radiate His armor of light in this world, adorned with His glory, we stand ready for His second and final coming.

It’s an exciting time! The Apostle Paul reminds us, **“The hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.”** (Rom.

13:11) Christ is coming, and we eagerly wait in anticipation. The hymn writer Paul Gerhardt states the comfort and the challenge that all Christian's joyful live as we trustingly await for our Lord's coming. He writes in the hymn we just sang: *"O Lord, how shall I meet You, How welcome You aright? Your people long to greet You, my hope, my heart's delight! O kindle, Lord most holy, Your lamp within my breast to do in spirit lowly all that may please You best.*

Love caused Your incarnation; Love brought You down to me. Your thirst for my salvation, procured my liberty. Oh, love beyond all telling, that led You to embrace in love, all love excelling, our lost and fallen race.

He comes to judge the nations, a terror to His foes, a light of consolations and blessed hope to those who love the Lord's appearing. O glorious sun, now come, Send forth our beams so cheering, and guide us safely home. " (LSB 334:1, 4, 7)

Through the gracious love of our heavenly Father, who sent His Only Son to be born and suffer death for us, we have been called out of the darkness of sin and into the marvelous light of Christ. The Apostle Paul tells us, **"The night is far gone; the day is at hand, So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light."** (Rom 13:12) Putting on the light of Christ and shine in His glory as we joyously await for His second coming is what we are given the opportunity to do in this world. When He comes He will take us from this world of darkness to live with Him in the heavenly realms – where His light of grace and glory will shine for eternity. That's what we are looking forward to and that's what we need to share with others. Amen.