

Wake Up
Romans 13:11-14
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I invite you to stand with me this morning out of respect for the reading of God's word to us from Paul's Letter to the Romans, beginning in chapter 13 with verse 11. Listen to the word of the Lord.

Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. 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. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

This is the word of the Lord, thanks be to God. All flesh is grass and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers and the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, and the flower fades, but the word of the Lord will last forever. Amen, and you can be seated.

The 1999 movie *The Matrix* begins in what appears to be a relatively normal city, with relatively normal people, on a relatively normal day. Soon you meet the main character, a man named Mr. Anderson, who goes to work in his very normal corporate job and sits in his very normal cubicle. But even in the first few moments you notice that there is something that is just not quite right about the world in which Mr. Anderson lives. Everything is just a little dull in its appearance, as if it's all not quite real. And what you come to learn is that what is seen is actually an image created to give the illusion that people were living a normal life.

The initial turning point of the film takes place when Mr. Anderson is asked if he would like to know and see what is actually real. Do we want to know and see what is truly real, too? Then perhaps the time is come for us to wake up.

The Apostle Paul is writing to a church that in many ways has become comfortable, things are on cruise control in a sense. No major crises, no serious obstacles to overcome at the moment, things are pretty good. But what he and the other Apostles of the first century were adamant about was the belief that the Lord Jesus would return in their lifetime, and because of this, every moment counted. When Jesus ascended, he left the disciples with very specific instructions: to baptize and make disciples. And he told them that his return would be soon. In Mark chapter 13 Jesus tells his disciples, concerning the day or the hour, no one knows (not even the angels, or even the Son, only the Father knows.) But says stand guard, keep awake.

Perhaps the reason why some were being lulled into complacency, and perhaps the reason why many churches in the world have become too comfortable in our life together is because we have lost the sense of urgency in time.

The way in which Paul describes time is not like time as it ticks on a clock. It's not chronological time, the Greek term for this use being the word *chronos*. But the word Paul uses to describe the time that you and I are in right now is the word *kairos*, and *kairos* means this moment right now. Using this term, what Paul is telling the church is that now, and in God's cosmology, all of time is washed away into one continuous now, there is no moment like the present moment—for now is the time for us to wake from our sleep.

One of the ways that I think we've been lulled into sleep is with the belief that we have to create the perfect life for ourselves. Friday was the single biggest shopping day of the year. Anyone else go out to the stores or the malls Friday? I did, but not to buy anything, I just enjoy being around the crowds for a while. But this is the time of year when you and I are bombarded from every angle with the message, 'tis the season to find that perfect gift, to make that perfect dish, to host that perfect party, to create that perfect home for Christmas. We are led to believe that these are the things that make us more truly ourselves. But Jesus invites us to see that it's not in what we do that leads to life, but what he does, and more specifically who he is that leads to life. And the way we do it is by dying and rising with him. Jesus says if anybody would come after me, let them deny themselves, take up the cross, and follow me.

There is a perfect illustration of this in Jesus' great parable of the Prodigal Son. The younger son takes the inheritance from his father, and Luke says he took a journey into a far away country, where he squandered his property in reckless living. He was going out to find himself. What the younger son believed was that if he could just go out and live for himself and make a name for himself, create a life for himself independent of his father, that then he would be truly happy. But then in Luke chapter 15 verse 17 it says, "but when he came to himself," that is when he woke up...he realized that the place where life was to be found was with his father.

Have you ever known a person who was sick for a long time? Maybe they were confined to a hospital bed. And perhaps you didn't see them for a long time, but then when you went to see them you might have said, "Gosh, so and so is just a shadow of their former self." The good news of the gospel, the hope of being in Christ, is that when, as Paul says in verse 14, we put on the Lord Jesus and his identity, we now become a shadow of our future self.

We no longer have to worry about whether the life we've created for ourselves is worthy of Better Homes and Gardens or HGTV because we've clothed ourselves with Christ and his glory. In 2 Corinthians 5 Paul says, I don't want you to be unclothed, but that we would be fully clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up in life—true life.

There is a real you, a uniquely *you* you. God made you to reflect his abundant glory in some unique way. God has given you a special facet with which to show his love, and the way in which we discover this true self is by leaning into the life of Jesus Christ.

As we begin in this season of Advent, we embark upon a spiritual journey. Every one of us is in a place in our lives where God is inviting us to come close, to let go of the anxiety, the doubt, the arguments and simply approach the manger and see the mystery and wonder of God becoming flesh. But when we do this, we do so with a sort of double vision. Because we can't see the manger without seeing also the cross. In TS Eliot's poem the Journey of the Magi, he remarks that this birth is also a death.

God is inviting us not only into a manger, but also to a table. And like the Prodigal who spent the entire journey home planning his apology, planning how he was going to make the perfect apology, how he was going to make it right, what he came to realize was that it was the Father who was already making plans for his return and had set the table in his honor.