

Put on the Armor of Light

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our text for this First Sunday in Advent is from the Epistle reading. **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. . . put on the Lord Jesus Christ.** Here ends our text.

Works of darkness versus the armor of light. Just what are works of darkness and when and where do they happen? Our government agencies keep track of the statistics of crime across our nation. While crimes happen in both the daytime and nighttime, violent crime such as robbery, assault, rape, and murder happen primarily at night when it's dark. Where do these crimes happen? Which state has the highest violent crime rate? You might think that those states with the largest urban areas would be the highest, like New York, California, Michigan, or Illinois which are home to New York City, Los Angeles, Detroit, or Chicago. But actually, the state with the highest violent crime rate is Alaska. Despite having the lowest population density of all the states, Alaska has the highest violent crime rate per capita than all the others, over twice the national average. Why is this? Some say it's due to a lack of enough law enforcement. But I might argue that it's because, while Alaska has some long days in the summer, the state has some extremely long hours of darkness in the winter. And when men dwell in darkness for a long period of time, they do works of darkness.

Why this connection between darkness and dark deeds? When men dwell in the light, everything they do can be seen. Their behavior is seen by neighbors and co-workers and any bystanders. All those eyes keep watch, enforce the law, and keep dark deeds in check. But when men dwell in darkness, their deeds go unseen. They are hidden. This is why assaults and rape happen in dark alleys. This is why burglars and assassins operate at night, darken their faces, and wear black clothing, so they remain hidden. When a man is hidden in darkness, then he commits his crime.

Think about your own life. When you're at church, at work, or greeting your neighbor as you walk through the neighborhood in the daytime, you're on your best behavior. Every word you say is heard and every act you do is seen. But at nighttime, when you withdraw into your home, what are you like then? What are you like when your actions are hidden? What do you watch on television or the computer screen in the darkness? How do you speak to your wife or children when no one else is around? Do you swear and curse? What gossip are you passing along on your social media device? What addictions do you pull out of hiding when no one is looking? When you're hidden in the darkness is when you do your dark deeds.

But there's another place that's just as dark, even in the daytime. It's the darkness of our own sinful mind. You see, our mind is another place where no one else can see. What are you like when your thoughts are hidden? With our thoughts we commit adultery when we lust. With our mind we commit murder when we hate. With our sinful spirit we covet when we scheme to steal from our neighbor. On the outside we're all smiles, but on the inside we're full of hypocrisy. There's nothing darker than the fallen, sinful mind, which we keep hidden in our private thoughts. When our mind is hidden in darkness is when we think our dark thoughts.

Of course, we think that no one can see us in the darkness. We think our actions and thoughts are hidden from view. Therefore, we conclude that they'll be no repercussions, no consequences, no punishment. However, there is one who does see our works of darkness. It's not our neighbor peaking in through the window or our spouse hearing us talk in our sleep. No, it's the omniscient God who sees all and knows all. It's the one who will judge us and condemn us for our works of darkness. And every day we get a little closer to that day of judgment. We get a little closer to the day of our death when every man will be immediately judged for his deeds. We get a little closer to the Last Day when every condemned man will be sentenced and cast into the darkness of hell. Judgment is nearer now than it was yesterday.

But besides being our judge, dressed in a dark robe, our God is also the Lord of the light. On the first day of creation, God said, "Let there be light," and there was light, even before there were the sun and the stars. And even though the devil and fallen Adam plunged the world into darkness and works of darkness, God again sent His light into the world. Isaiah prophesied, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone." This light who lightens the world is the

Son of God. Jesus said to his disciples, “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” When Jesus was in the world, He did works of light. Jesus opened the darkened eyes of the blind so they could see. He opened the hearts of sinners so they could believe in him. He cast out demons hidden in the minds of captive people. Jesus showed compassion when he fed the hungry, healed the sick, and raised the dead. He showed God’s love when He had mercy and forgave sinners for their dark deeds.

But how can our just judge forgive our works of darkness instead of condemning us? During holy week, there were some men who worked in the darkness. Behind closed doors, they plotted against Jesus in secret. They bribed the disciple Judas who left Jesus at night. In the Garden of Gethsemane, they arrested Jesus in the darkness. Jesus said, “Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns.” Then they secretly tried Jesus at night. They became His judge and condemned the light of the world to the darkness. For three hours, from noon on, the sun’s light failed, and the whole land was in darkness. At three o’clock, the light of the Son of God went out as Jesus entered the darkness of death and the darkness of the tomb. But upon the cross, Jesus bore God’s condemnation for the works of darkness of all mankind, yours and mine. On the dawn of Easter morning, God again said, “Let there be light.” Jesus arose from the dead and became the light of life for all who believe in Him.

And as Jesus awoke from the darkness of death, it’s time for you to awake from the darkness of night. The apostle Paul says in our text today, “**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.**” Paul exhorts us to turn away from the darkness and our works of darkness. Repent and turn to the light of Jesus Christ and His forgiveness. Cast off your dark thoughts and works of darkness: lust and adultery, hatred and murder, jealousy and covetousness. Let us wake up from our sleep, walk as in the daytime, and put on the armor of light.

What does it mean to put on the armor of light? It means to put on the Lord Jesus Christ who is the light of the world. How is this done? How do we put on Jesus Christ? First, we put on Jesus at our baptism. At our baptism the Lord peels off our black burglar’s clothing and washes our darkened faces. He forgives our sin and clothes us in His righteousness.

Second, we put on Jesus Christ when we put on godly love for our neighbor. Instead of breaking the Commandments we fulfill the Commandments by loving our neighbor. We honor our parents, serve and obey them, love and cherish them. We help and support our neighbor in every physical need. We lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do and love and honor our spouse. We don’t covet and steal, but we help and be of service to our neighbor in keeping his possessions. We defend our neighbor, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way. We put on Jesus when we put on love which does no harm to our neighbor but fulfills the Law.

Finally, we put on Jesus when we put on faith in Him and keep it on. God the Holy Spirit gives us this faith in holy baptism and keeps us in the faith through the Word of the Gospel. You put on Christ when you come to worship to confess your sins and receive absolution. You put on Christ when you take the body of blood of Jesus into your mouth for the cleansing of your soul. You put on Christ when you read the Bible and hear His promises of eternal salvation.

And every day we get a little closer to that day of salvation. We get a little closer to the day of our death when our soul will depart to be with our Lord in heaven. We get a little closer to the Last Day when our dead body will wake from sleep and rise with a glorified body to meet our Lord and life and light. Salvation is nearer now than it was yesterday. Paul says, “**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.**” So, take off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Put on Jesus Christ. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.