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Romans 13:8-14

“Opportunity Time”

In the early church, there were special vestments. Distinctive garments ... like robes and albs. These were worn by leaders.

And there was another vestment – a white garment wrapped around a person coming up out of the waters of baptism.

“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” were the words spoken. And the watchful people standing on the shoreline, caught the meaning.

“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” The worshippers on the rocky shore, people who thrilled to metaphor and poetry, they understood.

“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ,” So the people were singing, and chanting, and hoping and praying.

“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ” I believe some among those at baptisms were crying, were moaning, for they knew the cost of putting on Christ. For already the emperor had issued warnings and edicts that condemned this upstart group who claimed Jesus as Lord.

And remember, Jesus, at his crucifixion had a sign above his head, KING OF THE JEWS. And so the emperor’s lackeys were rounding-up those believers, and if they did not recant and proclaim Caesar as King ... the Lord over all, they were hoisted-up on crosses that scarred the roadsides into Rome and other cities ... a dire warning to all who passed.

**So putting on the Lord Jesus Christ had consequences.
Some positive and worthy. Some devastating.**

**Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine.
But even more powerful – more potent and
persuasive –**

Blessed assurance ... JESUS HAS MADE ME HIS.

**And those in awe at lakeshore baptisms (or at any baptism)
would sing ...**

**(well, actually, it wasn't in their song book ... but
certainly in their hearts and minds)**

**Blessed assurance, JESUS HAS MADE US HIS!
AND WE FOLLOW IN HIS WAY. WE HAVE PUT ON
JESUS CHRIST.**

**But also that understanding of Jesus and Jesus' way sent
shivers down the spines of many, for they recognized that
their affirmation of Jesus Christ as Lord was defiant and
counter cultural ...**

**and put them on the Emperor's "Most Wanted" list ...
and his officers would track them down.**

BUT JESUS HAS CLOTHED US.

CLOTHED US ... WITH WHAT?

You mean you haven't noticed?

CLOTHED WITH ... the new way of Life.

CLOTHED WITH ... the culture of Adoration.

... the activity of Love.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER, Paul wrote.

That's the one thing we owe one another ... LOVE.

Those pesky commandments ... like;

You shall not commit adultery;

You shall not murder;

You shall not steal;

You shall not covet;

and any other commandment,

**All are summed-up in this one word ... in this grand
instruction:**

"Love your neighbor as you love yourself."

**Paul goes on, "Love does no wrong to a
neighbor, and therefore love fulfills the law."**

And the neighbor to whom Paul refers is close at hand ...
...but is also beyond next door or just around the
corner.

Neighbor is wider than Presbyterian, or Christian,
or Judeo-Christian,
Neighbor crosses oceans and embraces
nationalities, and gender, and race.

Loving God and neighbor is the practice by which Christian
communities are analyzed and tested ... tested not just by
others, but by God.

I wonder, are we defined by law and commandment or
have we become ... are we becoming a new community
in Christ defined by our loving? ...

... where we abide in Christ ... having put on his
garments. Having put on Love.

Love builds community.

Love is way beyond sentimental feelings...indeed, the
love of which Paul speaks and which the church insists
has to do with **ACTIVITY NOT FEELINGS.**

Love builds church. Love is way beyond people
clinging to familiar and worn-out ways, exerting self-
serving power, trying to right a listing ship.

Love seeks it's neighbor's good, establishes
justice for all people, challenges covetousness
and greed.

Love has an ecological impulse, assuring
that this good earth provides enough for the
needs of all, but not feeding the insatiable
greed of a few.

Love bears all things, believes all things.
Love hopes all things. Endures all things.
Love never ends.

AND WHAT COMES FIRST IS THE LOVE OF GOD!

God's love for us.

God's love for all God's people.

Oh how I enjoy the sacrament of baptism, especially the baptism of infants.

I get a lump in my throat every time I lead or even as I observe the baptism of a child.

For to me, and to the church, baptism of a child is a bold, stirring affirmation that what comes first of all is the love of God.

The baptism of an infant, more clearly than anything else, proclaims that even before we utter one word ... way before we can stammer the word "God" Yes, even before we offer "thank you" ... GOD CLAIMS US.

PAUL REMINDS, DO YOU KNOW WHAT TIME IT IS?

Now's the time to awake from sleep.

It is opportunity time!

You've been dozing, perhaps, worn-out by 101 things to do, and there's more of the same for tomorrow.

Now's the time to awake from sleep.

It is opportunity time!

Dozing ... perhaps you're scared about that diagnosis ... is it about you? ...your spouse? ... a loved one or neighbor?

Now's the time to awake from sleep.

It is opportunity time!

A person, quite sad ... depressed ... so many losses ...

Now says, "I can't get out of bed ... I don't want to get up ... I just want to sleep ... I want to slip away.

Now's the time to awake from sleep.

It is opportunity time!

AND THE OPPORTUNITY... IS TO SEE OURSELVES WITH NEW EYES.

Remember that white robe as you came up out of the water at baptism. Oh, I know that wasn't you. You were baptized as an infant/a child.

But remember the hopes and dreams your family had for you and for themselves... and hopes the congregation cherishes.

Yes, I understand those were Roman citizens years and years ago ... but try some holy imagination.

Or perhaps you were never baptized! So remember a special moment in your life and you said "I can do that. Or if the time was right ... when I can afford it ... and you felt tugs ... or pushes... I know that's way in the past ... but perhaps it was just yesterday.

**Now's the time to awake from sleep.
It is opportunity time!**

Remember when you had a dream ... or fond hopes ... and you got to work ... and your life rolled along with joy ... and you made a difference ... and people touched your life And you enlivened others. Acts of justice and kindness flowed through your life.

Ok, so perhaps you are not like you used to be, but here's what the apostle Paul wants us to understand/to appreciate/to appropriate.

Paul, in these verses we have before us assures us that we no longer need to be entirely like ourselves. Paul shows us a picture of the new persons we are becoming ... Loving our neighbors as we love ourselves.

So dress for the occasion ... for the great day coming. Put on the armor of God. Or as it is stated yet again, put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus' mercy not only forgives our trespasses; but also fortifies us against temptation. Jesus' mercy models a whole new way of living.

Put on the Lord Jesus.

Love your neighbor as you love yourself.

**NOW'S THE TIME TO AWAKE FROM SLEEP.
IT IS OPPORTUNITY TIME!**