

Faith that Wakes Us Up to God's Everpresent Salvation
Based on Romans 13:11-14 and Romans 1:17-2:6
David Jahnke, 12/1/19

Paul tells the Roman Christians and us that it is time to wake up from sleep and see and feel God. They were surrounded by sin and idolatry and had been formed in them. And Paul lets them know that it is time to completely step away from these things which had clouded the light of life inside them with darkness.

The same goes for us. The outward expression of the idols has changed -- we do not worship Aphrodite or Apollo or Dionysus but we still idolize human intelligence and lust and greed and power. They surround us and we have been formed in them. And Paul comes to us today and says, "Away with all of that crap which only leads to quarreling and broken relationships in your homes and communities." So let's turn to God -- the only one who can rid us and the world of the crud -- especially in this Advent season when we look ahead to the time when God will come again to make all things right by judging and getting rid of everything wrong. Paul will not let us simply wait for that day; he insists that we get on with it now!

God powerfully heralded the coming of judgment and righteousness once already. And if we go back 2020 years to this point in time, Baby Jesus was sleeping in the comfort and the darkness of his mother's womb. The world was about to wake up in Jesus...

But at this point his mother was thinking about the darkness of a long journey to Bethlehem and whether her baby would survive. She was thinking about all of the gossip surrounding her pregnancy and how even people close to her continued to doubt and murmur about her story of God working behind the scenes in a miraculous way.

And yet she and Joseph continued toward the star above Bethlehem. They held onto each other in the coldness of the night. They remembered together the visit of the angels to Mary and Joseph in a dream and what the angels had said.

All of us feel Mary's anxiety and fear. We sense people doubting us and gossiping about us. We wonder, "What will come of our kids? Nothing tragic please, God! What do people think about them and us? Do people believe me? Or do they think I am hiding something or being deceptive for my own purposes?"

So in the midst of this darkness, I want to ask you this. Will you husbands and wives cling to each other with unconditional support? Will you parents make sure your hurting and fearful children know that they are loved and cared for no matter what? Will the church extend this love and trust to each other and the world? Will we remember God's faithfulness to us and the Church? That is how we continue an often cold and dark journey to Bethlehem and how Christ will be born in and around us once again and help us to wake up to God's presence.

The Roman Christians had seen the light of Christ and they had magnified it to those around them. And Paul starts off his letter to them by giving thanks for their faith. Our faith in God, more than anything, else is why God delights in us.

So thank you, Thrift Shop and Food Bank workers, elders, deacons and committees for your service; thank you choir and praise band for your music, but what I am really grateful for is your faith. Our God who is with us now says, "Thanks to all of you for your good work. But what I want more than anything else is you -- your hearts, your love, your presence, your communication." It's no different than what a parent wants from their child. Of course we want them to be good and do good things but much more than that, we want them to trust us and stay close to us and love us, just as we love them.

But the Romans retreated to the comfort of darkness. Paul told them about how humans gave themselves over to darkness in Romans chapter 1 and after building to a climax in which the Romans were surely getting on their high horse about how non-believers were lost in sin and idolatry, Paul takes an amazing turn. Listen to his words from Romans 2:

²Therefore *you have no excuse, whoever you are*, when you judge others; for in passing judgement on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. ²You say, 'We know that God's judgement on those who do such things is in accordance with truth.' ³Do you imagine, whoever you are, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgement of God?

⁴Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? ⁵But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgement will be revealed. ⁶For he will repay according to each one's deeds:

Paul is saying two very important things: 1. Every one of us still desperately needs God's mercy and kindness and the transformation of his Holy Spirit. So 2., don't dare condemn others. Instead show them the same kindness and mercy that God has shown us.

Now this does not mean that we do not judge actions. We are constantly making judgments about our own actions -- what to do and what not to do and then evaluating them -- and we are sometimes called to judge others' actions as well. Paul is simply reinforcing Jesus' teaching that we have look at our own actions first, especially when the judgment of others rises up in us emotionally which is a sign that there is something inside of us in need of correction and healing. Jesus said , "Take the log out of your own eye before helping others with the speck of wood that you see in their eye." But we do help them with the speck.

Someone brought up the adulterous woman a while back. The leaders wanted to condemn her to death. So Jesus said, "Any of you without sin should throw the first stone." And they all walked away. Jesus comforted her but then he said to her, "Go and sin no more." Judgment of her action remained.

The session recently had the very difficult task of judging Marcello's calling and reached the same conclusion at the end of two long and difficult meetings. It was not a sudden decision. Marcello had not fulfilled his job description with regards to children or youth for many years. And important and specific directions from me, personnel and session regarding the children's choir, and the second service were dismissed time and again.

I am sure you have questions which you can bring to me or an elder. Please join our prayer for Marcello -- that he will have more energy and excitement for his two other vocations from God -- elementary school teaching and workshops for choral directors and music teachers.

And in closing, I ask for your prayers and your peace and your faith and your hope. In a world that is filled with self-righteousness and condemning others wherever we turn, I charge you to humbly remember that God alone is righteous and good. And that God works for the good in every situation and God is more powerful than any of us. So we simply need to trust in Him...and give His Holy Spirit space to work.