

Wake Up. Get Dressed. Let's Go.

In the name of our coming King, dear friends in Christ: The single appliance which almost everyone has and finds indispensable *and* almost everyone hates with a passion is an alarm clock. It sits there so smugly ticking away on the nightstand next to your bed mercilessly counting down the minutes to the unhappy moment (that ironically you yourself predetermined) when it will sound off, thus commanding you to wake up, get out of bed, and face the new day. You must admit there are times when you absolutely despise the sound of it. That's why I've never understood those people who set their alarms a half hour earlier than they want to get up so that they can hit the snooze button two or three times before rising. It's like they want to torture themselves hearing the alarm go off again and again. Once is more than enough for me, thank you very much; which is why I'm fortunate to be a naturally early riser. On mornings that I have to be somewhere early, like say Thursdays when we have the 6:30 am Bible Study, I'll set the alarm to be on the safe side; but I'm usually awake and up long before it goes off. On such days my wife appreciates it if I remember to deactivate the alarm before I leave the room. She gets a little testy if I forget. So very rarely does the alarm actually go off at our house. Trouble for me is that because she knows I'll be up, I'm her alarm clock when she has to be someplace early. "Wake me up at this time." So instead of the clock, I get to be the bearer of bad news and the object her irritation.

But happily in my calling as pastor, I also get to be the bearer of good news. In today's Epistle, St. Paul reminds us that there is another alarm clock inexorably ticking away. This one has been set by God himself. And it's counting down the minutes and hours to the exact moment that he has predetermined for our Lord Jesus Christ to return in glory, raise the dead, and judge all people sending them to their eternal destinations. As sure as he set a time for Christ's first coming in humility to save us, which Scripture calls "the fullness of time", he has also set a precise time for his second coming. And with every passing instant we are getting closer to it, as Paul says, "Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed." In view of this, Paul advises us to wake up now. The dark night of this fallen world subject to sin and death is nearly over. The bright Sun of the Eternal Day is about to rise. So wake up now, because you don't want to found wandering lost in La-La-Land, fast asleep in spiritual slumber when that alarm goes off.

And just in case we his readers don't pick up on the metaphor he's using, Paul explains what he means by being asleep. "Let us cast off the works of darkness", he tells us, not walking "in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy". He means the life of sin. He means the way of this world. And this is the problem we have: we tend to dismiss our sinful behavior. We tell ourselves it's just the way we are and that we can't help it. Or that at least our sins aren't as bad as somebody else's – as if that made our own sins okay. No. God categorically hates every sin, no matter how small they are in your eyes. He calls on you to hate them too, to despise your sinful desires, your fits of anger, your pride and selfishness, and to turn from them in disgust. Cast them off as if they were a filthy, diseased garment, the kind that makes your skin crawl that you just can't wait to get out of. Christ is coming. His appearance is imminent. It could happen any moment. And you don't want to stand before him wearing an outfit like that.

It's only logical. It's part of your daily routine. After you wake up and take care of your morning ablutions, you get dressed. No one leaves the house in their pajamas or bedclothes (unless, I've noticed for some people anyway, if they are going to Wal-Mart. Apparently some folks think the rules for proper attire don't apply there. But I digress ...). I expect that just about

everyone has had some version of that dream in which you find yourself in a hurry in the morning, and then you're headed off to work or to school or to some other public place, and then suddenly you realize that you've only got on your underwear, or worse, that you forgot to put on any clothes at all. Remember how that made you feel? It made you fearful of being caught exposed and ashamed of yourself. That fear is a good thing. It saves you from a lot of embarrassment. It also saves the rest of us from having to see things we'd rather not see. Paul would have us capitalize on that fear with respect to what we are wearing in a spiritual sense. Cast off the deeds of darkness. Repent of your sins. And then get dressed properly. Put on the armor of light. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

How do you do that? By returning to your baptism. You remember the catechism. Baptism, the fourth part: "What does such baptizing with water indicate? It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever." In baptism Christ himself washed you of all sins and clothed you with his own righteousness. And now through daily repentance and the remembrance of his saving work on the cross he washes and clothes you again. He robes you his holiness – which, I hasten to add, is not some spiritual flimsy, lightweight thing, but Paul calls it the armor of light. And armor, of course, is what soldiers wear. It's what they put on when facing the enemy in battle.

For it is a battle that we face every day. The temptations, lies, and deceitful schemes of the devil rain down on us like the arrows of a thousand enemy archers. His cleverly hidden traps and snares are scattered across the battlefield. Only wearing the armor of light – that is, Christ and his righteousness – and guided by God's Word and the Holy Spirit can we survive his onslaught and avoid his traps. But survive we can. And more than merely survive, we can win. We can take the fight to the enemy. We can hit him where it hurts. Not through violence of action, but by the exact opposite. The enemy hurts us when he lures us into sin, that is, into the breaking of God's Law. We hurt the enemy when we keep the Law of God. We hurt the enemy when we show forth Christian love, because love is the keeping of the Law. And clothed with Christ we can be like Christ showing forth the light of his love in this otherwise dark world.

You are probably familiar with the bugle call *Reveille*. If you've never served in the military, you may be forgiven for thinking that it's sort of the sound of the alarm clock going off for the armed forces, telling everyone when it's time to wake up. That's the way Hollywood usually presents it. But actually it's not. The truth is that *Reveille* signals first formation. By the time *Reveille* sounds, everyone had better be already awake, properly dressed, and assembled, ready to go accomplish the day's mission. In today's Epistle St. Paul tells us that this is how we are to be at all times so that when the trumpet of the Lord calls the final *Reveille* we will be awake, clothed in Christ, and ready to go. By God's grace may we always be so prepared. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!