

# Put on Christ “The Day is at Hand” / Evening Service

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Date: 27 November 2016

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's pray. Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening. In Christ's name. Amen. Hello, it's me again. So we are pressing pause on our series in Revelation for Advent. And I know this is a relief to some of you. I've heard from a couple of people that they're saying, they say, Revelation is so crazy. It's so baffling. It's so up here. And I don't know how to relate it to my life. Well, this week, we have the Romans passage.

And you have something very practical. No more orgies. Verse 13. Did you see that? You guys catch that? So I'm going to take a very hard line here. No more orgies. We're done. All right? They're over. Stop. Now, you probably have two questions at this point. Who are these people that Paul is writing to? They sound like they're up to a lot of crazy stuff. Well, I think they were just Christians kind of trying to live out their faith in this very cosmopolitan, fleshy city in Rome. And actually, they weren't really orgies. They were called after dinners, technically. And they were dinner parties. And at the end of the dinner party, the couples would go, the female would choose somebody that she wanted to wander off with. And it was the early sort of feminist thing, actually. It's quite interesting, but still terrible.

But anyway, this is the kind of thing that happened in this city. So Paul was addressing things that were very real for these people. The second question you might have is, why are we preaching this leading up to Christmas? Isn't there like more Christmassy stuff?

Well, here's the reason. I didn't choose this passage, actually. This is from the book of Common Prayer. So the BCP, which is, if you're kind of new to the Anglican thing, where is it? So this is the book of Common Prayer. And it has all our sort of services in it, and the ordination services and psalms and lots of cool stuff in there. But there are lectionary readings, which is a yearly rotation of Bible readings that cover the spectrum of sort of God's Word. And during Advent, the readings are laid out for us. So these four weeks leading up to Christmas. And it's a time, Advent is a time, amongst other things, where we consider Christ's birth and we think about Christ's return. And we sort of lean into the great hope of that. And so these readings from the BCP for Advent, the Romans ones anyway, they're basically what they're trying to do is help us to get our head in the game for Christmas by emphasizing some Christian practices for us to work on leading up to Christmas. So that

Christmas isn't reduced to this kind of schlocky, sentimental, silly, stressful sort of season. So the readings this week, the reading this week talks about the practice of putting on Christ. That's one of the final things it says. Put on Christ. So the passage arrives there.

[ 3 : 21 ] And each week there'll be another practice over the next four weeks. So let's get into it. So four weeks, four practices, first week, first practice, putting on Christ. But we've got a bit of work to get there. So let's do a little bit of an overview. It's helpful to have your Bibles open here. Romans 13. Right. As you slide your eyes over the passage of Romans 13, what you'll see is an emphasis on love, which is the essential mark of a Christian, isn't it? And it talks about love in three ways. It links love to three different things. It links it to the law, which is quite interesting. It links it to time. That's quite interesting. It links it to Christ. So that's three sections of the sermon. Love and law, love and time, love and Christ. Let's go. Love and law.

Now, Paul, in the previous passage, this is kind of an odd way of starting it there. So let's just explain that. In the previous passage, Paul had been talking about our responsibility to be good sermons and to be financially responsible. And so verse eight is this kind of transition.

Transition. It kind of links these two kind of thematic ideas. So it says, owe no one anything, referencing the stuff he's just talked about and coming into this new section. Now, that's not a prohibition on loans. It's just saying pay back your loans sort of within the terms of the contract, honorably and with integrity. But he says there's one exception to this.

Don't owe anyone anything except love is how the whole thing starts off. Now, what does that mean? Origen was a third century theologian and he wonderfully explains it. Let me quote him. He says, let your only debt that is unpaid be that of love. Isn't that wonderful? A debt which you should always be attempting to discharge in full, but will never succeed in discharging. Okay, so that's how he introduces this concept of love. And then he connects love to the law. And that's very helpful for us that he connects love to these commandments. And the really great thing about that is what it does is it puts some meat on the bones of this idea of love. For one, one of the things it does is it puts some theology around the idea of love. You see in verses 8 to 10 there, it says that love, when you love, you're fulfilling the law. Now, the law, it's talking about that. It's talking about the commandments. That's why it quotes a few of the commandments. And it's talking about the commandments as they relate to our relationship with other people. So don't murder, don't covet, et cetera. And he says, basically, you could summarize all that by saying, love your neighbor as yourself. Now, apart from establishing some, you know, some great theology there, why does Paul want us to see a link between love and the law? Because you might not automatically connect those things.

He links it because if you take away the law from love, what are you left with? You're left with kind of love is just this thing that you kind of feel, right? Love becomes this thing that you just kind of let flow. You let your heart guide you. And that's a problem. Because when love is uncoupled from real practice, from real concrete things, from rules, which you don't think might have anything to do with love, but when you uncouple it from those things, it sounds full on, but love can get perverted.

[ 6 : 55 ] I'll give you an example. Let's, and this is a sensitive example, I realize, but one of the reasons people leave their spouses, there's lots of reasons people do that, but one of the reasons given commonly is love. I just love this other person. This is the love of my life. I finally found the love of my life. And so what they do is they break a commandment of God in the name of love.

So it's a perversion of what love is supposed to look like. It's supposed to look like commitment. So this is one of the reasons why Paul connects it to the law, because otherwise it just becomes this feely sort of thing, love does. My wife really likes this blogger who's kind of Christian-y blogger, author, and well, she liked this person up until recently. And she really liked this blogger because this person had a very honest style of writing. Nothing was off limits, and she really loved that. And this person wrote books on marriage, and she talked about a marriage, which was quite difficult, but she'd always come back to this, you know, it's about commitment. Commitment was the key, sticking with it, stick with it, stick with it. But she'd talk about how hard it was, but sticking with it's really important. Anyway, about two months ago, she released a book along a similar vein, *Stick With It, Commitment*. The same month, she announced she was leaving her husband and moving in with a famous sports star who left their marriage for this person.

And she wrote about her reasoning. She wrote about her reasoning for doing this in a blog post, and I read it. And she says that she needs to live her truth bravely, and I'll quote her here. She goes, my sacred responsibility as a leader, she calls herself a leader because she's got about two million followers, right, on Twitter and her radio blog post. She goes, my most sacred responsibility as a leader is to model what it means to be so comfortable in your own being, your own skin, your own knowing, that you become more interested in your own joy and freedom and integrity than in what others think about you. So, when you separate God's laws from love, the goal of love just becomes to be happy.

But when love and law are connected, and you have concrete examples of love, do not covet, for example. When these things are connected, obviously love comes to the conclusion that, no, I'm not going to leave my spouse. But it's often used as an excuse to do that. You see how love becomes perverted when it's removed from the law. Modern sort of secular thinking, I've been reading about this week, trying to get my head around this idea. Why is this, why are people reading what she said and just lapping it up going, oh, this is so true, it's so true, it's wonderful. Why are two million people reading this and really being quite excited for her that she's found the love of her life? It's because, I read this guy this week on secular, modern secular humanism, and he said the good life, because used to be defined as, or like the good life, he said the good life is no longer seeking God's glory, the health of society, the well-being of the family. He said the good life means making yourself happy, that's your primary duty. That's the most important thing in the world. And it's so ingrained that the great sin of our age is self-betrayal.

The great sin of our age is self-denial. And you see how that's the opposite of what the Bible teaches about love, and it's certainly the opposite of what Christ taught us, and the example that Christ gave us.

[10:52] So, summary so far. So, Paul here in Romans, he puts some meat on the bones of love. And he says you cannot separate love from morality. You cannot separate love from the law. It gets very untidy. It gets perverted. So, love and law is the first thing the passage does. It connects those two things. Then love and time. This is very interesting. If you look at verses 11 and 12, slide your eyes over there. Besides, you know the time that the hour has come to you for wake from sleep, salvation is nearer, etc., etc., night is gone, day is at hand. There's just lots of time references in there. You can ask yourself, why is it? Why do they keep connecting love with time? What is that about?

Why is it so important that we think about time here? Well, the basic image is this. We live in between ages. So, we're in the world, and that categorizes the world as kind of like nighttime, is sort of the metaphor here, nighttime. But we have this great hope ahead of us of Christ's return, and that's kind of like called the new day here. The Bible says that Christ has gone ahead, and he's preparing a place for us where our bodies and our hearts will be remade, and our tears wiped away, and it's going to be wonderful. But we're not there yet. But that doesn't mean that this future hope we have of Christ's return, it shouldn't remain this very sort of just vague idea out here.

No. Paul says, folks, wake up. It's dawn. The day is getting closer. Every day it's closer. But you're still in your pajamas. That's the basic image here. You're still in your pajamas.

We're heading into this new life. We're heading towards this new life. We're living in the hope of this new life. But you're living as if it's not coming. You've still got your pajamas on.

That's sort of a basic overview of 11 and 12 there. Now, let me give you a story, a true story, to sort of illustrate this. Why is it so important? How does this affect the idea of love?

[ 13 : 01 ] Of living into this future hope that Christ will come back. Knowing that we're in the world still. Knowing that we're sort of experienced night, but dawn is coming. I'll tell you a story.

So this husband and wife got lost in Nevada in 2012. This is a true story. And they're from Penticton, actually. From Penticton. And they were on a road trip to, I think, like a, like a, some kind of show in Las Vegas. And so they're driving the Chevy Astro all the way down there.

And they try and take a short cut. And they break down in this really remote area. After a few days of sleeping in the van, husband went out to look for help. And he was, he, they found him 18 months later. He died looking for help. It was very, very cold. And his wife, Rita Cretchen, she survived for seven weeks. You might remember the story. She survived for seven weeks in this van, a little bag of candy and some nuts. And she would take a big walk to the stream to get water every day.

And rationing just little bits of candy that she had. And she would place these bright colored blankets over the top of the car. And these signs in the windows, help, SOS, we're stuck, etc.

And towards the end, after seven weeks, she became so weak that she couldn't make it to the stream. And so she had to drink from these sort of muddy puddles. Anyway, after seven weeks, she was close to starvation. Three guys turn up on ATVs, all-terrain vehicles. And they find her. And they give her what, you know, they realized what was going on pretty quick. And they gave her what they had, which was a pack of Doritos and some beef jerky, which is, I believe, what the Red Cross recommends when you're in those situations.

[ 14 : 42 ] And they said to her, she was too weak. They wanted to pull her out, like chuck her on the back of the ATV and take her into the city. But she was too weak to hold on, right? So they said, would it be okay if we just left you for an hour? We think there's a, we know there's a ranch around here somewhere. Just, can we leave you for an hour and we'll be back? She said, okay. Now the National Post, I went online and I read the National Post story of how this kind of played out.

When the ATV people returned with help, they were shocked by what they saw. So this is the National Post journalist writing now. Mrs. Cretchen had taken down the blankets, ripped down the pieces of paper from the windshield, had her purse slung over her shoulder, suitcases packed and ready to go. She even appeared to have fixed her hair. She was smiling. She was happy, one rescuer recalled. The paramedics attended to her. Mrs. Cretchen handed the bag, the family, their bag of Dorito chips neatly rolled up and clipped at the top. Isn't that delightful?

So what happened in that hour to this woman who was starving? Well, she was living all of a sudden, an hour before, she realized she was living in the in-between time. She was still in the darkness, but there was this fabulous hope ahead of her. She knew she was going to be rescued. The whole perspective, her whole perspective on her situation, her circumstances completely changed. For one thing, she pulled down the blankets and the signs. She stopped trying to, she removed all attempts to save herself and she was happy. And one of the reasons she realized she was happy because she looked around her Chevy Astro and she realized this is not all there is to my life anymore.

And it completely liberated her thinking. It's a beautiful story, right? Now, when we live in this world, as if this is all there is, we can have a couple of respondents, a couple of responses. We can become completely despondent, like this woman would have been drinking out of muddy puddles. Or we can think we need to make the most of it. If there's no ultimate hope, let's just make the most of what we got.

Let's just make it all about us. Let's just make it about fulfilling our own bucket list. But if this life leads to something infinitely more glorious than what we have right now, then our life now, it doesn't have to be about maximizing our life.

[ 17 : 10 ] It doesn't mean we have to have every experience. This means, you know, it's okay if you never get to see Paris. It's okay not to be sexually active. It's okay not to live a life of maximum sensual pleasure. It's okay not to be rich. It's okay never to own a brand new car.

So when we know we're going to be rescued, we know when we know there's a greater hope, something incredibly glorious coming down the pipeline. It also frees us to love sacrificially because we realize it's not all about now, and it's not all about me maximizing my utility in my life.

In his book, *The Weight of Glory*, C.S. Lewis writes this. I think I've quoted this before, but it's so wonderful. I'll read it again. C.S. Lewis says this, Okay, summary. Where are we?

To help us love in this world sacrificially, like Christ, Paul reminds us that the day is at hand, that Christ will return, and we're in this in-between time. Now, where are we in this sermon?

We've talked about love and the law. We've talked about love and time. Now, lastly, love and Christ. Love and Christ. Verse 12 says we should cast off the works of darkness and put on Christ.

[ 18 : 54 ] There's a lot of intention in these words. It's like the pajamas thing. We're taking off the pajamas. We're putting on our day clothes. We're putting on our business clothes. A lot of intention here.

Cast off the works of darkness. It's saying stop doing those things that you are willingly doing wrong, that you are willingly doing those things. Stop doing those things. So the things described in verse 13 there are, they're not accidents.

Sexual morality, draconess, orgy. You don't accidentally find yourself at an orgy. I don't think. If you have, it's probably a very interesting story.

You don't find yourself accidentally in these situations, do you? You don't accidentally become jealous. You don't accidentally... These things we intentionally do, and he's saying cast off these things.

Did you notice also it puts jealousy on the same level as orgy? I find that very interesting. So cast off these things. And then verse 14, put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 20 : 00 ] Again, it's leaning into that mourning imagery. Put on your day clothes, folks. It says, wake up. Put them on. Take off those silly pajamas. That's nighttime wear.

Now what does this all mean, put on Jesus? Because that's the Advent discipline this week's reading is trying to get to. Let me make a couple of comments about what I think that means.

Putting on Christ, what does it mean? Well, I think first, it means Paul's reminding us that what enables us to love and what enables us to not do these things here doesn't come from within us.

The passage doesn't say, buck up. It doesn't say, try harder. It says, receive something. Receive something. You cannot transform yourself.

The transformation, the enabling and the transformation, it comes from outside of you. It comes from outside of you. You're receiving Christ.

[ 21 : 04 ] Second thing I think it means there is like clothing, this passage put on Christ every day, like your clothing, you take it everywhere with you. You take Christ with you everywhere.

My clothing is on the bus with me. It's at my work. It's at my home. It's with my kids, with my marriage. Take Christ with you to work, to school, on the bus, at home.

Take Christ to the pub with you, to the parties with you. Thirdly, if you put on Christ like a coat, that means that Christ is always between you and everything else.

Between you and everything else. If you have Christ on you, between me and you is Christ. That means I look at everything through Christ. I look at my wife through Christ. I look at my enemies through Christ. I look at my friends through Christ.

I look at the guy that delivers my mouth through Christ. The person that's serving me at the supermarket. I look at them through Christ. I look at creation through Christ. And lastly, if I put on Christ, he is the closest thing to me.

[ 22 : 08 ] I keep nothing from him. Christ is the closest thing to me. I trust him. I rely on him. I pray to him. I ask him to change my heart. I invite him to every area of my life.

That's what that means. Let me finish with a quick story. Augustine. You know Augustine, right? He was one of the great Christian theologians.

He wrote his testimony, a book called Confessions. He's about 1,500 years old now. Still very beautiful. Still very relevant. He had a Christian mother who prayed for him every day and who taught him the faith. But he didn't really come to faith until his 30s.

Interesting guy. Had a great job. He was a rhetorician. He taught rhetoric in a university in Milan in the imperial court there. He was a man about town. He loved the ladies. Lots of lady friends.

He was very convinced of the intellectual side of Christianity. But there was this barrier. And the barrier, he says, was his lust. Because he loved his woman friends.

[ 23 : 11 ] And in his book Confessions, he says this. He writes so beautifully. He says this. My old loves held me back. They tugged at the garment of my flesh and whispered, Are you getting rid of us?

And at some point he had a vision of a woman he calls Lady Continence. And she says to him, Why are you relying on yourself only to find yourself unreliable? Isn't that great? Cast yourself upon Christ.

Do not be afraid. He will not withdraw himself so that you fall. Make the leap without anxiety. He will catch you and heal you. So he has this vision. And then he's at a friend's house.

And he hears these kids singing this song. Take up and read. Take up and read. It must have been some ancient sort of chorus. Christian chorus. And so there's a Bible on the table where he's at his mate's house there.

And he picks up and he opens the Bible up. It falls open to Romans 13. Our passage tonight. Falls open to that. Romans 13, 13 to 14. And he reads, Let us walk properly as in the daytime.

[ 24 : 08 ] Not in orgies and drunkenness. Not in sexual immorality and sensuality. Not in quarrelling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ. And make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires.

And he says in his book Confessions, He says, See what Augustine realized is he didn't have to make his own yellow brick road to happiness, right?

That way was bankruptcy, he realized. In his own words, Without God, what am I but a guide to my own self-destruction? He saw his greatest flourishing was in the sacrificial life of Christ.

And this thought and this power and this enabling, It didn't come from outside of him, did it? He prayed for mercy. The Bible spoke to him.

He prayed for mercy. And he prayed for change. And he got it. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.