

If Only They Knew
November 27, 2016
Romans 13:11-14

The little boy loved to read. He often hid under the covers with a flashlight, devouring books well past his bedtime. No matter how often his parents tried, they couldn't derail this nocturnal habit. Worst of all, the boy loved horror stories. Many nights he awoke crying from the nightmares produced by his beloved books.

Then the bad dreams stopped. The puzzled parents stood outside his bedroom door one night to discover what had changed. Over and over, they heard the boy say, "If only you knew what I know."

The next morning Dad asked what it meant. "I read the last page of the book to see how it ends," the boy explained. "Then I read the book. Every time someone in the book is about to die, I say to them, 'If only you knew what I know.' Then I'm not so scared."

If only you knew what I know. That's an Advent phrase.

If only we knew how things would turn out. We'd feel so much better. That's the issue in our gospel reading. "*About that day and hour no one knows,*" Jesus said to the disciples, "*neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*"

This is one of those texts that results in wildly unfaithful interpretations of the Bible. People make all sorts of predictions about when the end of the world is coming. Most of them make money off those predictions. Every one of them has been wrong so far. So let us pay no attention to them.

These failed prophets spend time watching the clock instead of preparing for the alarm to go off. Our job as Christians is preparation, not prediction. That preparation means loving service to our neighbors in the name of Jesus Christ.

If only we knew how things would turn out. We'd feel so much better. **But, we do know!** "*Besides this,*" Paul writes to the Christians in Rome, "*you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep*" (Romans 13:11).

It is time to look in two directions at once. We know that God answered the people's long-suffering anticipation of the Messiah's birth. We trust that the Messiah will set all things right in the end. And we live out that trust in hope here and now.

It takes water to wake us up. I am a very heavy sleeper. When I was young it was sometimes impossible to wake me up. In desperation my dad would sometimes resort to sprinkling cold water on my face as I snored. No matter how tired I was, that always did it.

"*Put on the Lord Jesus Christ*" is a call to remember our baptism. It takes water to wake us up.

At our baptism, we were clothed in the robe of forgiveness. It is this gift of forgiveness that carries us beyond our own nights, through and beyond our own desires and flesh to live for the

neighbor. The Christian life is a daily practice of our baptism until the day we die. Baptism is death, an ending, but then it engages us in a wakefulness that continues our whole life long.

Being awake does not require being afraid. Paul describes the behaviors of people who will do anything to avoid anxiety. He is not describing the warm feelings of a family Christmas gathering. He uses the words associated with the wild parties thrown by Roman funeral societies where the goal was to be drunk enough to become unconscious—anything to stop fearing death.

If only they knew what we know, Paul says. They might not need to drown their fears and wash away their worries. “*The night is far gone,*” Paul reminds them, “*the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.*” **We know!**

The same goes for the Ninth and Tenth commandments. “You shall not covet,” we read. Coveting is not about stealing. It is about lusting after the property of another. It is about satisfying our desires at the expense of another. It is about using stuff to soothe our worried hearts. It is about putting possessions in the place of God.

If only they knew...but we know! The alarm clock rings. It looks like a cross. It feels like resurrection. We have read the last page of the book. But we aren't talking to characters on a page. We are talking to living, breathing people who are scared to death of dying. If only they knew what we know...

They will know if we tell them. That's the main point today. **They will know if we tell them.**

We can tell them with our words of invitation. How many of you will invite someone to be part of our worship and fellowship here in the month of December?

We can tell them with our actions. For those clothed with Christ, the future is characterized by seeing the "other" as neighbor and seeking the neighbor's best. In this season of mindless acquisition and thoughtless consumption, we can obey the ninth and tenth commandments. We can “be of help and service to our neighbors in keep what is theirs” (Ninth Commandment, meaning).

If only they knew what we know Well, let's get the word out! **They will know if we tell them.**

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