

Romans 13:11-14 (CEB)
The day is near

11 you know what time it is. The hour has already come for you to wake up from your sleep. Now our salvation is nearer than when we first had faith. **12** The night is almost over, and the day is near. So let's get rid of the actions that belong to the darkness and put on the weapons of light. **13** Let's behave appropriately as people who live in the day, not in partying and getting drunk, not in sleeping around and obscene behavior, not in fighting and obsession. **14** Instead, dress yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ, and don't plan to indulge your selfish desires.

Waking Up Is Hard To Do

“[Y]ou know what time it is. The hour has already come for you to wake up from your sleep.”

One of the strange things about 2020 is the warping of our sense of the passage of time. Although the Apostle Paul was speaking figuratively about the disciples knowing the time, over the last nine months, we literally have **not** known what time it was -- and I don't mean the hour, I mean at times we have been clueless as to the day it was! The Washington Post published an article in September called “The Coronavirus pandemic is shattering our sense of time.”¹ You may remember asking “what day is it?” when we were quarantined at home. The article talked about a reporter in Cleveland who would remind people every day what day it was when he realized how much trouble we were having knowing the days! At first it was funny, you know -- every day he would dramatically announce the day. But by May, the skit got old. It wasn't funny anymore.



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https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/its-been-six-months-our-sense-of-time-is-still-broken/2020/09/10/1f6a5442-6dc7-11ea-a3ec-70d7479d83f0_story.html

Every day became Blursday, and the running joke became “we used to have Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and now we just have Day, Day, Day, Day, Day, “We had sort of lost our mental landmarks or temporal boundaries for days.”²

As for me, it feels like time hasn’t been moving at all, but strangely after quarantine ended it also feels like time has flown. It really feels like we have been sleep-walking through the last few months. And so what a profound message we find in today’s text.

“[Y]ou know what time it is. The hour has already come for you to wake up from your sleep.”

No matter how disorienting the past year has been, it is time to wake up to the purpose God has in mind for us.

Scottish theologian William Barclay described this scripture using this title: “**the threat of time.**”³ The idea is that we tend to be complacent about the passing of time. We can’t seem to get a handle on it. We think we have all the time in the world, but then we look up and it’s almost December -- time flies. Time gets away from us -- and once it is gone, it is gone. In the grand scheme of our existence we usually pay no attention to the passage of time!

That Washington Post article about time and coronavirus told the story of William Becker and his grandmother. The reporter wrote about a “FaceTime conversation he had with his grandmother as she lay dying of covid-19 in a Nebraska hospital in late July. It turned out to be his final conversation with her. But, you see, he thought she had more time. Nana, as he called her, had beaten breast and lung cancer in her 88 years. With ancestors who had lived to become centenarians, “She has a lot of longevity in her genes,” the grandson said. He thought he had more time with her. He told his Nana, who was in pain but lucid, that he couldn’t wait to see her at his wedding, which had been postponed due to the virus. When he tried to speak to her again a few days later, she was unconscious and fading. A nurse stood respectfully to the side and held the phone up so he could look at her face and tell her he loved her. He only had a few minutes, and the knowledge that it would be their last time together was at the top of his mind.”

He just thought he had more time with her.

The Romans text reminds us:

“[Y]ou know what time it is. The hour has already come for you to wake up from your sleep.”

The waking up that Paul talks about is a call to action for the Roman church. He was calling them “to moral action in view of the time,” not a specific date but in light of a significant moment. Paul says their salvation is nearer than it was when they first became believers, and it was time for them to wake up and take action. And that makes total sense, because every day of our lives, we are one day closer to seeing Jesus either in heaven or when Jesus comes again. Paul was warning about coming face to face with their Lord and wishing they had had more time.

What a warning for us this day! What an opportunity we have --- to wake up and to take action **with** God and **for** God in light of this significant moment in time. This Advent message

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https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/its-been-six-months-our-sense-of-time-is-still-broken/2020/09/10/1f6a5442-6dc7-11ea-a3ec-70d7479d83f0_story.html

³ William Barclay, The Daily Study Bible Series: the Letter to the Romans, p. 176.

about being people of the light seems of heightened importance when there seems to be so much darkness in the world!

But we disciples have always had trouble staying awake. There is a heartbreaking story in Matthew 26 about Jesus going to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. It was just hours before Jesus would be betrayed, arrested and crucified. And Jesus went to the garden to pray an agonized prayer -- do you remember what happened - "he threw himself on the ground and prayed, that he would have the strength to accomplish God's will for his life----to face his own brutal death. And he asked the disciples to remain at a distance and pray with him. But they fell asleep! Not just once or twice, but **three times** they fell asleep that night. And Jesus woke them up each time. And finally, Jesus told them:

"Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going..."

Matthew 26:45-46

Friends, it is time for us to wake up. And the message I really want you to hear today is this good news --- we receive lots of these wake up calls in our lives. If we fall asleep once, Jesus wakes us up. If we fall asleep twice, Jesus wakes us up. If we fall asleep three times, Jesus wakes us up. And the wake up call may get louder and louder, more and more insistent the more we ignore Jesus's call to come and follow him. Because you see God is never going to give up on us. God's grace is never ending and continues to draw us nearer. God's grace continues to empower us more and more to an amazing life of loving God with all that we are--a life of loving people the way that Christ loves us.

Over the course of our lifetimes, we **will** have many wake up calls -- we ought to pray for and we should expect many instances of spiritual awakening. Looking back, I feel like I slept through my first thirty years -- but I can also see that day by day the Holy Spirit was steadily awakening me. God's mercy and grace are never-ending, but our time is short. And so that is why Paul writes this urgent message to the church at Rome -- wake up!

There is so much grief, trauma and stress these days that some days all we really want to do is to pull the covers over our heads and hide. But remember that this scripture is a call to action at a significant moment in time. Friends we are at a significant moment in time --- Advent during a pandemic! So, during the four weeks of Advent, there are three ways I challenge you to wake up to the call God has on your life:

First, I pray that we might all **wake up to the presence of God in our lives**. Throughout his life, Jesus sought out God's presence regularly and earnestly. It is our purpose to do the same -- to know and to love our Creator -- to enjoy the presence of the Lord. We do this through spending time with God -- through practicing spiritual disciplines every day! Our focus this Advent is on the practice of prayer. In fact, we invite you beginning December 1 to Pray Your Way Through Advent. There is a written resource called *Prayer Practices for Disciples: Creating a Life With God*⁴ that is free to you - there is a pdf you can download for free or we have some of the books in the church office for you to pick up. This book has a different prayer practice for you to try Monday-Friday throughout Advent. Not only do we ask you to read along, but we will be posting on facebook and emailing you videos created by different people in the church that teach each prayer practice. So-- you can read about it, watch the video, and practice

⁴ <https://store.umcdiscipleship.org/product/prayer-practices-for-disciples-creating-a-life-with-god/?v=7516fd43adaa>

a different way to pray each weekday. This is going to be a great way for us to wake up to the presence of God in our lives. It is a great way for us to grow as people who follow Jesus.

Second I pray that we might wake up to ourselves --- to how we are dressed. In today's scripture, Paul says wake up and get going, but he also says get dressed. Paul says we ought to dress ourselves in Christ -- we are to clothe ourselves in Christ. And this image is one of taking off the old, dirty clothes and putting on new ones--replacing old ways for new ones--replacing vices with virtues. Being clothed in Christ is a metaphor for Christian discipleship. When we put on Christ, we are imitating Christ. Paul says:

The night is almost over, and the day is near. So let's get rid of the actions that belong to the darkness and put on the weapons of light. **13** Let's behave appropriately as people who live in the day, not in partying and getting drunk, not in sleeping around and obscene behavior, not in fighting and obsession.

And while I would love to skip right past verse 13, I think this is an important part of this scripture because our outward behaviors (the way we are clothed) can be harmful both to ourselves and to others. Now we don't know for sure, but it sure seems like Paul lists some very specific things -- the Roman church must have been having problems in these areas. And actually, these things are problems for us today, too --drinking, sleeping around, fighting and arguing with one another. These specific vices are unhealthy habits and behaviors that leave us sleepwalking through life, and they may even destroy our lives and relationships.

But these vices can also represent any behavior that is self-centered and destructive. We are **not** clothed in Christ any time we are excessively self-focused. So I challenge you this Advent to wake up to yourself. I hope you will ask yourself over the next few weeks of Advent: am I going to wake up one day and wish I had lived these days differently? One of the prayer practices as you Pray Your Way Through Advent is the prayer of examen -- it is an examination of our own selves. In that prayer practice, we will consider how we have done God's will or failed to do God's will. We will consider how we have loved or failed to love God, our neighbors and ourselves. And we will pray about how we might seek to clothe ourselves in Christ with God's help. And so, this Advent let's examine ourselves, let's begin to notice when we fail and ask God's help to do better.

Know that God's forgiveness is always available. So, the deeper work of this process is receiving God's forgiveness, loving ourselves, and being honest about areas where we need help with healing. Maybe this Advent is a time to be honest with ourselves about problems in our lives like Paul talks about --- addictions, stress, anxiety, depression, grief, strained relationships, and financial problems. There's no time to waste in leaning on God when we have problems and in getting professional help when we need it. This is how we grow as disciples; this is how we clothe ourselves in Christ. It is hard work looking at ourselves, but it is how we become clothed in Christ.

Third, let us **wake up to the needs of our neighbors.** Lately, the pandemic has done a pretty good job of waking us up to the needs of our neighbors. On the news we have seen long lines of people waiting to get food at food pantries in the last few days. We know the trauma that our medical professionals are experiencing. We know people who are sick and grieving. We know people who are isolated and lonely. Not only that but we have been awakened to the pain of racial injustice that we have been blind to for oh so long. We are almost so awake to the needs of our neighbors these days that we feel overwhelmed and helpless. But this Advent, let's ask God to show us that one person who needs something that we can give. Are there physical

needs we can help with? Are there prayer needs we can help with? Do we need to make a phone call or write a note? Are there people we might invite to worship or who might want to learn about prayer practices? God will show us how to act if we ask.

Friends, today's message is about waking up to God's purpose for our lives. If the news of God's consistent, persistent, and insistent grace is going to be shared..... it is up to us. God intends for us to tell people that the night is almost over and dawn is about to break. My prayer for all of us this Advent is that we might wake up to see exactly how God intends we accomplish that purpose. So hear the scripture once more -- as found in the message Bible...

11-14 ... make sure that you don't get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day-by-day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, oblivious to God. The night is about over, dawn is about to break. Be up and awake to what God is doing! God is putting the finishing touches on the salvation work he began when we first believed. We can't afford to waste a minute, must not squander these precious daylight hours in frivolity and indulgence, in sleeping around and dissipation, in bickering and grabbing everything in sight. Get out of bed and get dressed! Don't loiter and linger, waiting until the very last minute. Dress yourselves in Christ, and be up and about!

God has a purpose for your life--especially during this pandemic moment in time; that purpose is to love and to be loved. We can't afford to waste a minute. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION Holy One, you call us to wake from sleep and be ready. The dawn of a new time of preparation is upon us. Forgive us when we don't rise up and take our faith seriously every day. Forgive us when we fail to love you, love our neighbors and love ourselves. Let us clothe ourselves with Christ; help us to live so that everything we do reflects the light of Christ to the world. Amen.

Pardon:

God, who is merciful to all, forgives us all through the grace and compassion of Christ. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. In the name of Jesus Christ you are forgiven. Amen.