

“Voices of Advent”

November 30, 2025

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Romans 13: 11-14

Paul's letter to the Romans is one of his later letters. That is important to us this morning because it helps us understand where Paul is coming from. The early church knew some things for certain. The first was that the coming of Jesus changed everything. God came to us in Jesus that we may never be alone. And beyond that, Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus took the final chapter in everyone's life – from His day to present day – Jesus took the final chapter in everyone's life and opened up the possibilities. Death did not have to be the end. There was more. There was new life. There was eternal life. There was resurrection, and that changed everything. But they noticed something else too. Nothing changed. Greed and selfishness still ruled the world. In the world and in their own lives, the sinful nature of greed and selfishness still ruled. The voice of greed and selfishness was as loud as ever – maybe louder. And people were still dying. Christian people were still dying. Good Christian people were dying. Jesus changed everything, but more needed to change. God was not done yet. Jesus was not done yet. Jesus changed everything, but more needed to change. And they knew Jesus was going to return and finish the job. He would silence greed and selfishness, make hope, peace, love and joy win every time. Jesus would establish this world as God's kingdom – no longer ruled by the voices of greed and selfishness – but ruled by God's voice. A voice that says love your neighbor as yourself and serve one another out of reverence for Christ. People will no longer see each other as adversaries, competing for limited resources; but as brothers and sisters walking together, sharing the abundance which God provides. In Jesus, God changed everything, and Jesus would soon be back to finish the job. That is what the season of Advent is all about. Preparing for Jesus to come back and finish the job.

But like I said, Romans is one of Paul's later letters. Jesus was supposed to be back by the Sabbath, then the next Sabbath, and the next. But Sabbath's kept coming and going and Jesus had not come back. What do we do now? In earlier letters, Paul actually suggested that we not get married or have children, and just focus on preparing for Jesus' return. But it has been years. We have to work in order to eat. We have to get married and have families and continue to do life in this world. But Jesus' death and resurrection changed everything. For 2000 years of Advents, the church asks, “How do we move forward in a world where everything has changed but nothing has changed?”

Well, let's look at what Romans says. Romans 13:11 starts out “You know what time it is,” then proclaims it is time for 3 things. First, you know this is the time when there are 2 very powerful but very different voices in the world. The voices of this world which lead to death, and the voice of Jesus that leads to life. Our reading is only 4 verses long but look at all the images Paul

uses to differentiate these two voices and the worlds they come from. Verse 11, being awake as opposed to asleep. Verse 12, voices of the night versus the voices of the day. Voices of darkness to be thrown off as opposed to armor of the light which are to be put on. Verse 13, to walk with decency and honor as opposed to drunkenness, illicit sex, quarreling and jealousy. Verse 14, putting on the Lord Jesus and making no room for the flesh and its desires. The first thing Paul says is recognize there are two very different voices that you are hearing in this world. Do not pretend there is only one. Do not pretend they get along. Recognize these voices are adversaries. They are opposing forces fighting over you. One is life-as-it-has-always-been which ends in death. That one sees neighbors and even family as adversaries who we compete against. The other is the voice of Jesus that changed everything. That is the voice of love and serve your neighbor as yourself. That is the voice that comes from the One who changed everything. And change is hard. But what changed is that life can win over death.

The second thing our passage is telling us is, it is not only time to recognize there are two voices, but it is time to follow the voice of God. Verse 14, “make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” The path to eternal life has more than one fork in the road. It is not a “make one good decision and you are golden” kind of path. It is continuing to choose Jesus. When things are good and the blessings are flowing, continue to follow the voice of Jesus. When things are hard and they are getting harder because you are trying to choose Jesus, still follow the voice of Jesus. When nothing you do or say seems to matter at all, follow the voice of Jesus. There are going to be trials along the way. There are going to be temptations along the way. Listen to and obey the voice of Jesus. And when you mess up and follow the selfish, greedy voice of death – which you will every once in a while – it is not over. Jesus died to take the punishment for those moments. Go back to listening and following the voice of Jesus. When it comes to how we act, whether we are alone or with a group, it matters. How much we drink, who we are intimate with, who we argue with and over what, what we long for and why; Romans 13 says it matters. Because jealousy, quarreling, sexual immorality, drunkenness, and egos gone wild are all acts of obedience to this world’s selfishness and greed. They are signs you are listening to the voice that leads to death. “You know what time it is” says v. 11. It is time to wake up and listen for, then obey the voice of life, the voice of light, the voice of decency and honor, the voice of Jesus. It matters which voice you listen to.

In this time when everything has changed because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, and nothing seems to have changed at all; the third thing our passage from Romans says is it is not only time to recognize the word of God, and obey the word to God, but time to put on the word of God. Verse 12, “Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.” The image is clothing. We “throw off” the dirty shirt that works as camouflage to make us blend in with the world and those around us, and “put on the armor of light” which makes us stand out as different, as not just part of this world, but as ones who follow a different

master's voice. The voice we listen to and follow is not just an inward change. It is like changing our shirt to a new style that everyone can see. It is part of our witness.

And do not be surprised when it feels like you are sticking out, like people are staring at you, and you suddenly feel alone in the struggle to follow the voice of life. The reality is, for those who do not know Jesus, there is only one voice, and it is the voice of selfishness, greed, and ego. The voice of me against everyone else to get what I want and there are no rules. But know that you are not alone. Jesus came that you may never be alone again. His presence, His power, His promise, His voice, His Word is always with you. Guiding you, empowering you, making you more than you could even be on your own. Christmas is celebrating God with us. And we know what time it is.

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