

Green Hill Presbyterian Church
“Time to Get Dressed”
Thomas G. Speers, III
Advent 1 – December 1, 2019

Lessons: Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

One of the books that we used to enjoy reading when certain people who are now taller than their parents were little was Kevin Lewis’ book, *Chugga, Chugga, Choo-Choo*. It begins: “Sun’s up! Morning’s here. Up and at ’em, engineer.”¹ Sometimes I used those words in the morning when I made sure our kids were awake and getting ready for school. I can’t tell you how many times they heard me gently or not so gently saying: “Time to get up. Time to get dressed. Sun’s up! Morning’s here. Up and at ’em, engineer.” Those actually are words for the season of Advent.

Paul writes to the Romans about waking up and paying attention. “Up and at ’em, engineer.” Gene Peterson translates Paul’s words this way: “But 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!”²

Today we begin the season of Advent. It is our season to be alert, to wake up, to “dress ourselves in Christ, and be up and about.” So much of our lives is lived “oblivious to God” at work in the world, not noticing the divine breaking in, living as if being nice and going to church on Sunday are all that God asks of us. This season is our time to get up and dressed and to pay attention. In a couple of weeks, we will be singing, *Let every heart prepare him room*. Advent is the time to make those preparations. Father Walter Burghardt once described Advent this way: “Advent is the season to take the barnacles off my Christian bottom - the obstacles that keep me from being enthusiastic in my faith and hope and love, too sophisticated to love God with all my mind and heart, all my soul and strength, too self-centered to love my sisters and brothers like other selves, as Jesus has loved me... [This is the season to ask] how Christlike am I where I am, in what I do, with the people whose lives I touch? How do I handle the three main goals all too many Americans admit to: money, power, fame? How do I relate to Christ crucified today - crucified in the children abused and the elderly unloved, in the AIDS-afflicted and the drug-addicted, in blacks still enslaved and Hispanics newly unwelcome, in the homeless and the hopeless in my own parish?”³ Advent is time to get up and get dressed and to be about the work of God in our hurting world.

We do this because Advent is not simply about getting ready to celebrate a birth that happened more than two thousand years ago, wonderful as that birth was. Advent is also about looking forward to that day when Christ will come again. So wake up and get dressed and then also pay attention—watch for the ways that God is breaking into our world even right now. Watch for the return of Christ that we might be ready whenever that day arrives.

¹ Kevin Lewis, *Chugga, Chugga, Choo-Choo*. © 1999

² Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message, The Bible in Contemporary Language* NAV Press © 2002.

³ Walter J. Burghardt, S.J. *Advent: Remember, Repent, Rehearse*. *The Living Pulpit*. Vol 6 No 4 October – December 1997 © 1997.

Of course, we don't know when that return will be. Jesus is quite clear that no one knows the day or the hour—no one! Because it has been so long, some of us live as if we figure it won't ever happen; yet Advent proclaims that because we do not know the day or hour, we should start living right now as if Christ were returning today. Because we do not know exactly when he will return, we should be ready right now, in case today is the day. So, Jesus tells us that we should learn from the time of Noah. The majority of people in those days just went on living as they had always lived—eating and drinking and getting married, following the regular routine when suddenly the flood came and swept them all away. Only Noah was busy, preparing for the day. Only Noah was ready. Or consider a fear many of us know—the fear that someone will break into our homes. If you knew someone was going to break in tomorrow afternoon, you likely would call the Wilmington or New Castle Police and have them all ready to catch the culprit. If you knew when the thief was coming, you'd do what was needed to keep your house safe. “Therefore,” Jesus says, “you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

Barbara Brown Taylor wonders how we deal with advice like that. “Well, why not be ready all the time, not only for the end but for whatever the moment brings? Every morning when you wake up, decide to live the life God has given you to live right now. Refuse to live yesterday over and over again. Resist the temptation to save your best self for tomorrow. Do not put off living the kind of life you meant to live. There is no time for that, no matter how much time is left.

“Go ahead and make the decision, write the letter, get the help you need, find someone to love, give yourself away. Why waste your time making preparations for an end time you cannot predict? Live prepared. Live a caught-up life, not a put-off life, so that wherever you are—standing in a field or grinding at the mill, or just going about the everyday business of your life—you are ready for God, for whatever happens next, not afraid but wide awake, watching for the Lord who never tires of coming to the world.

“Who knows? Ours may be the generation that finally sees him ride in on the clouds, or we may meet him the same way generations before us have—one by one by one, as we close our eyes for the last time. Either way, our lives are in God's hands. Either way, God leaves the living of them to us.”⁴

We know what time it is. It is time to wake up. The night is far gone and the day is near. Lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Jesus might return today. Are you ready to see him? Time to get dressed. Sun's up! Morning's here. Up and at 'em, engineer.

Let us pray: O God, in these difficult yet hope filled days, empower us to live with the recognition of your presence with us right now. Wake us up to the work of establishing justice in all places of oppression. Empower us to set aside our differences to discover the wonder offered us by those we may not recognize. In the days to come, keep us alert for opportunities to welcome the stranger and offer hope to the despairing, that we might expect to find you in every person we meet, in every place we go. In the days to come, may we discover that fear has fled as your hope draws ever near. Wake us up O God, and clothe us in your grace. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.⁵

⁴ Barbara Brown Taylor, *Don't Say When: Expecting the Second Coming*. The Christian Century, September 21, 2004 Vol 121 No 19 © 2004.

⁵ Adapted from LectonaryLiturgies.blogspot.com, © Thom. M. Shuman.