

## The Three-Fold Coming of Love

Advent 1 – 11/27/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Romans 13:8-14 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 10b-11, “...love is the fulfilling of the law. Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.”

### Introduction

✘ Ever since the eighth century A.D. the four Sundays of Advent have marked the beginning of the Christian Church year. It's a yearly cycle that we live; a calendar that protects us from going off on our own personal or worldly agendas. It helps to keep our focus as Christians each year – throughout the year – on Christ!

→ Every Church year ends, as we did last Sunday with Scripture Readings that speak of, and teach us about what is called “eschatology” or the last times. That fancy word comes from the Greek word “ἔσχατος” (exchatos) which means “last things”.

✘ So, why am I talking about the last things here on the first Sunday of the new Church year? Because our forefathers in the Christian faith were led by the Holy Spirit to see in God's Word a very important continuity, you might call it the ever-present “connective thread” of Christ and His constant “coming” to God's people.

→ You see the word Advent means “coming”. And as we wrapped up “last year” with our focus upon Jesus' second coming in the Eschaton (that is the Last Day), we now begin the “new year”, still pulling on that thread of Jesus Christ in Scripture; viewing Christ's coming to us in three different directions.

→ First, we look to the promises in Scripture from the Old Testament where it says the Messiah will come to save God's people. Then we look to the promises fulfilled as Christ did come in human flesh and still comes to us in God's gifts of Word and Sacrament. And finally, in Advent we keep our connection alive to the promise and fulfillment when Christ comes again at the end of time to raise all flesh and bring His people into His eternal glory in heaven.

✘ It's a beautiful cycle that we rehearse each and every year in the Church. It keeps us grounded on Christ, focused upon Christ above all else. And as Paul talks about today in our Epistle Reading from his letter to the Romans, it keeps us clothed in Christ as we prepare our hearts to celebrate His three-fold coming once again.

### I. Advent - Promise of Jesus

✘ So, Paul helps us focus our Advent eyes first to the Old Testament promise that Jesus will come; that He, as the Son of God, like an alien invasion, will break into our worldly-focused existence to save us from our self-inflicted destiny of destruction, death and darkness.

→ In verses 8-9, our Epistle Reading begins with Paul confronting every one of us in our Spiritual blindness; our sin-soaked sightlessness to how bad our situations really are in this earthly life. To do this he holds up the mirror of God's Law, the Ten Commandments, referring to Commandments 4 through 10 that address the way that God expects His people to live in our relationship with others, and He sums them up this way, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (v.9).

→ Back in verse 8 Paul stabs the condemning dagger in each one of our hearts with these words that all Christians want to fulfill but every Christian must confess we fail to do miserably: “Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law”.

✘ Paul lists a number of ways that we fall short of those Commandments in verse 13, the least of which is our utter addiction to “quarreling and jealousy”. Now, if any of you are still deluded into thinking that you are able to keep the Commandments to perfection, I suspect we can get at reality if I ask this one thing, “How did things go at Thanksgiving?” “In your holiday gathering, was everything 100% conflict-free?” “Was there even the slightest twinge of resentment or disagreement anywhere in the kitchen among those who were preparing the food?” Or in the family room about how things are going in your life or in the world – at work or in politics or even regarding your favorite football team. As you and your family look ahead and plan out your Christmas celebration, does everyone fully agree with your traditions? Are you and everyone else eager and willing to actually put Christ first in Christmas – making the celebration of His first coming with His family of believers in all of the worship services your first priority?

➔ I think Paul’s point should be obvious by now. We all fall short. We have not, and we cannot fulfill His Law to perfection as He demands. And so we need some other way to meet God’s Law or we will all be eternally condemned to the works and ways of darkness – separated from God!

✘ And yet, with the same words that convict us of our desperate need, Paul points us to the promise of God’s grace-filled answer. As He said at the end of verse 10, “Love is the fulfilling of the law”. You and I, folks, in our sin do not love as we should.

➔ But 1 John 4:10 teaches us, “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins”. So the answer is not in our ability to love, but in God’s greatest, most perfect expression of love in sending His Son, Jesus to us!

➔ Verse two of our Old Testament Reading from Isaiah, chapter two begins God’s promise that He will come to His people to address our sin-problem, when He says, “It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains...and all the nations shall flow to it.” And verse three narrows in on what and who this promise is really talking about, “For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem”.

✘ That’s the promise; the first direction from which we view the coming of Jesus; that “the word of the LORD” has promised to come to us.

## II. Advent - Jesus Has Come

✘ It’s in John 1:14 that our view is shifted upon the second direction of our Lord’s Advent; upon the fact that the promise has been fulfilled. It says that “...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth”.

➔ So God’s answer to fulfilling His Law that we love our neighbor as ourselves is to send His Son, into our fleshly existence, through the womb of an ordinary human mother. The Word is a person and He is the only one who ever could; ever would, as Hebrews 4:15 says, be tempted in “every respect...as we are, yet without sin”.

✘ It is in this coming of Jesus that Paul is able to say in verse 11 – as a statement of fact – that “salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed”. There’s a dual meaning to these very comforting words.

➔ First, yes, Jesus has come so near to us all that He took on our human flesh and bone. He took both the actual sins and the original sin of each one of us human beings upon Himself and He paid the debt that Paul references in verse 8 that we “owe” for our guilt and our condemnation of not loving others as we should. He paid with His own precious blood upon the cross. And yes, He conquered not only sin for us there, but also the death that we all deserve when He rose to life in victory three days later. He rose for our eternal victory!

→ Jesus, God's love in human form, has fulfilled God's law to perfection for you and for me and for all mankind.

→ And to aid those of us who were not yet living when Jesus first walked among His people in the flesh, He brings that fulfilled salvation and forgiveness and grace directly to each one of us here and now, in our current date and time. He delivers it through His conduits of Word and Sacrament. He is the Word of God in flesh. And He speaks that perfect, inspired Word of truth into our fleshly ears when it is preached and taught here in His Church and in our homes.

→ He brings us so near that He adopts us as His beloved Children in the cleansing water and Word of Holy Baptism. And He continues to feed us His grace and forgiveness so that we might remain strong in His gift of faith, as He places His body upon our tongues and passes His blood through our lips in and with the bread and wine of Holy Communion. You can't get much nearer than that on this side of heaven, praise God!

### III. Advent – Jesus Is Coming

✘ Yet as we live here today in the time between Jesus' first coming and His second coming, Paul directs the eyes of our faith as well to the third Advent view of Jesus's coming.

→ This is the second meaning of Paul's words in verse 11. Even though it may seem to us like Jesus is severely delayed in coming back as He promised – so much so that we may be tempted to get lazy in our faith, or even doubt whether or not He is really coming back, Paul assures us, "...you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed".

→ In Revelation 3:11 John hears the resurrected Jesus say, "I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown". Four times in the book of Revelation Jesus says, "I am coming soon" (Rev. 3:11, 22:7,12,20). Whenever the Bible repeats itself, you know it's really important; that God is saying, "You all need to take this seriously". So, when Jesus gives this promise four times...it's something you and I can count on as an undisputed guarantee!

✘ As we look forward to Jesus' promised coming, Paul speaks to us Christians to make sure that we don't get lazy; that we don't run the risk of falling back into our old sinful habits or allow the ways of the world to take us into the devil's deception.

→ He uses the image of darkness and light. Darkness covers our ability to see things clearly. It provides protection so that the evils of this world can sneak up on us; so that we might be tricked into thinking that we can hide our own sinful desires and actions. Darkness leads souls away from Jesus and into destruction, death and the dungeons of hell.

→ So Paul gives us a series of four imperatives; strong exhortations while we eagerly await our Saviors final return. #1, He says in verse 11, "...the hour has come for you to wake from sleep". You belong to Christ. He did not give His life so that now you can go through life with the eyes of your faith half-closed; just hanging out under your spiritual covers. No, He saved you to be an active and eager participant in His family, the Church.

→ #2, in verse 12 Paul says, "Let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light". It's not okay to say as Christians, "I can live with one foot still in my old life of sin, and one foot in the Church". No, Jesus has purified us with His blood through and through. And He has given us His "armor of light" to protect us and aid us in the spiritual battle of this earthly life. We have His Word of truth to fight against falsehood and deception. Paul lists all of the parts of God's armor in Ephesians 6:(13-17). There is the "belt of truth", the "breastplate of righteousness", the "shoes of readiness", the "shield of faith", the "helmet of salvation and the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God".

→ #3, in verse 13 Paul exhorts us to “walk properly as in the daytime”; having nothing to do with the sexual perversions, drunkenness, quarreling, jealousy and all that the world uses to tempt our old sinful nature to turn toward instead of Jesus.

→ And #4, Paul wraps up His counsel for us as God’s people of faith in verse 14, showing us our proper Christian wardrobe in this life. “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires”, he says. Jesus has already wrapped us in His robe of righteousness at our baptism so that when the Father looks at us, it is not our sins, but His Son Jesus that He sees.

But we don’t only wear Jesus on the “outside” as Christians. We have Jesus living inside of us through His Spirit; working in us – heart, mind and soul every moment of every day.

## **Conclusion**

✘ And we need all of that; Jesus beside us; Jesus above us; Jesus below us and inside of us as we prepare to celebrate His birth at Christmas and look eagerly to our future before His heavenly throne when He comes again.

→ This then is the three-fold coming of God’s love; the Advent of His grace that saves us and sustains us against the darkness that surrounds us. It is the coming of our Savior each and every day; forevermore; for our salvation. “Come quickly Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20). Amen.