

Romans 13:8-14

⁸Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet”; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

¹¹Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹²the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; ¹³let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Holy Spirit, as your word is read and preached, pass among your gathered people, opening minds to increase understanding, opening hearts to bind us together in your love. In Jesus’ name we ask it. Amen.

I am very glad for the opportunity to study passages from Paul these past 3 Sundays, especially today’s reading. The opening line of our selected text is extraordinary, considering that it came from Paul who had embraced the Jewish Law with a vengeance.

⁸*Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.*

This is an extraordinary line considering who Paul was before his conversion experience. We must not forget that Paul, called Saul before his encounter with the risen Christ, used the Law to separate: law abiding Jews over here; everybody else over there.

Saul was brutal to Jesus’ followers. Because he was so exacting in his dedication to the letter of the Law, he was similarly brutal to those outside the Law. For example, on the day of his run-in with the risen Jesus, he was bound for Damascus to round up Christ’s followers so he could put them in prison.

It’s just mind-boggling to me the more I think about this and try to imagine that the same man who sought to *separate* people could say, ⁸*Owe no one anything, except to love one another...* It’s mind-boggling that the same man could use the Law to divide peoples, and

then come around and say that the Law is completely fulfilled by the act of loving one another, which, of course, is the ultimate form of bringing people together.

Let us remember this is the same man who approved of Steven’s death by stoning. And yet it is Paul who gives us the earliest written record and witness to Jesus Christ. His conversion is nothing short of an astonishing about-face. Paul is an amazing example of, and witness to, the transforming power of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord!

Let us also remember that Jesus was a Jew, and thus the guiding authority for *his* life was the same Law that Saul used to reign terror on Christians. In our Gospel accounts we can clearly see that Jesus was aware of how the Law was being used to separate: Jew from Gentile; clean from unclean; the righteous from the unrighteous.

We can also see how Jesus made it his life work to show how the *original* purpose of the Law was to reveal God’s grace, that is, God’s desire for unity and communion. Thus using the Law to create divisions among the people was not God’s intent. The whole Law, every commandment, can be summed up with the words, *Love your neighbor as yourself*. Love fulfills the whole Law, and love desires communion, not division.

Paul was transformed by the love of Christ. I say this because Paul’s heart was so completely broken open. His new heart went out to all people and drove him into epic missionary journeys to bring the good news to the Gentile world. Love was the keystone for Paul, and I believe it was also his salvation.

Paul instructs us to *put on Christ* – something like dressing ourselves with Christ – which in other words means to take on Christ’s life as our life; to love as Christ loves. I am convinced that this is the best way to describe our salvation. Living and moving with genuine love (as Paul commands) is, indeed, an experience of salvation.

The transforming power of Christ’s love is revealed now in us. Our loving (which for Paul is the act of putting on Christ) becomes a means of participating in God’s ongoing, saving, renewing, redeeming, and reconciling work in our world – today and every day.

When Paul writes, *you know what time it is...* he is not referring to chronological time. He's referring to *kairos* time which is better described as time pregnant with God's presence and power: it is any time *and* it is all time. The time to put on Christ is now; the time to wake from sleep is now; the time to love our neighbor is now; it is indeed the time of our salvation, nearer than when we first believed.

Now is the time to wake from sleep. **Now** it is time to realize that while we mark the time of our lives chronologically, we live and move and have our being in *kairos* time; God's time. Thus every time is time to put on Christ; every time is time to live the love of Christ. And thus I believe *kairos* time is actually the time of our salvation.

Some people understand salvation as the moment they accept Christ. I believe that is true; no question. Some people believe that salvation is a future event when they are accepted into the heavenly kingdom with all God's saints and angels. That is indeed our hope and our salvation as well.

But if God is love, and God loves us unconditionally, and God loves us while we are yet sinners, then we have *always* been loved by God. *We have always been loved by God!* So...yes, now *is* the time to wake from sleep; now *is* the time to put on Christ, because **now** is the time of our salvation.

It is a human creation to mark time chronologically. This way of marking time has brought great order to our world. It has also brought great anxiety as well, as we race the clock to be on time, or fret or grieve over the perception of lost time. We may even imagine time to be a run-a-way train we can't get off. But take heart for Paul said, *salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers.*

We've created our earthly time, but chronological time cannot save us. Thanks be to God that we live in *kairos* time; God's time. And in God's time it is always time to love, and that's why I believe Paul wrote that it is time to **wake from sleep**. To live in love – to walk with genuine love in this world – is an experience of wakefulness.

As we love, we come to know God's saving grace. Love is a choice. We can choose to love. We can choose to put on Christ. Of course we can also choose to live solely in chronological time, and glide through our days doing what we do just like any other day. And tomorrow will be pretty much the same as we roll through each 24 hour cycle.

But I'll choose to love, and put on Christ. I can still mark my days chronologically (so I can be on time for choir practice), but in Christ my days are filled with a sense of possibility, hope, and the wonder of God's presence and power. Is this not a vision of our salvation?!

Now is the time to wake from sleep. Now is the time to get up and put on Christ, for our salvation is nearer than we think.

Thanks be to God. Amen!