

27th November 2016

Reverend Roger Walker
Romans 13: 11 - 14

Today on Advent Sunday we are looking forward to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to judge the living and the dead. We know that Jesus promised this and that it will happen, but we do not really expect him to come in our lifetimes - we've been waiting more than 2000 years, so what are a few more centuries? The Christians in Rome to whom St Paul was writing in our second Reading did not think this way. They, like St Paul, had a clear expectation that - although they could not know exactly when Jesus would come again - they did not expect it to be long delayed. Hence St Paul urging to wake from slumber, for the night is nearly over and the day is almost here. If Jesus might be coming soon as judge, then the last thing they want is to be found in sin when he comes. 'So put aside the deeds of darkness' writes Paul 'and put on the armour of light'. Just in case they don't understand this, he spells it out for them - no orgies or drunkenness, no immorality or debauchery, no dissent or jealousy. It makes you wonder what the Church in Rome was like, doesn't it?

So he tells them 'follow Jesus, not your sinful nature'. The thought that the Second Coming of Jesus might be just over the horizon was certainly an encouragement to lead a good and moral life, but what about us when we don't feel we have this threat hanging over us? We should not actually need the threat of judgement to make us lead a good and moral life: it ought to be an outworking of our Christian faith. In Paul's words, 'clothing ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ'. So this morning, despite it being Advent Sunday, let's forget about the Second Coming of Jesus and examine how well we clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. This means behaving decently as in the daytime, meaning when others can see us. I hope that I do not need to speak to you about orgies, drunkenness, immorality and debauchery: that would be quite a sermon really, wouldn't it? But how about dissent and jealousy? Both of these are very common temptations in our lives - so much so that we may not even recognise them as sins.

Let's start with jealousy. When we use the word we immediately think of something out of a romantic novel, but jealousy here is talking about being envious of things that others have - which we do not. We are in fact being reminded of the tenth Commandment "thou shalt not covet": we all know it is not an easy commandment to keep. We live in a society which is bombarded with advertisements of the things we really need if we are to have a good and fulfilled life - some of them we do not have and we cast envious, jealous eyes on our friends and neighbours who do. You can see why such covetousness - jealousy - is a sin, because our focus on material things and material wellbeing inevitably distracts us from the spiritual focus we ought to have on God and on all that he has done for us through Jesus Christ. It reminds us of the words that Paul wrote to Timothy, 'the love of money is the root of all evil'. And of course, if we are jealous of what our neighbours have, then it is very difficult to obey Jesus' command to love our neighbours as ourselves. Jealousy translates very quickly into disobedience to God's commands not to covet and to love our neighbours: disobedience to God is a sin. If jealousy leads us quickly into sin, then dissent does so even more, for God's desire from the very beginning has been for harmony among his human creation. But sadly he has been disappointed - right back to Adam blaming Eve for his disobedience to God and to Cain murdering his brother Abel. So it goes on all through the New Testament. When we come to the New Testament we find Jesus teaching of the pre-eminence of love and peace. He expects this among his followers, even if he did not get it from his twelve disciples who all too easily squabbled with each other. But love and peace - not dissension - is meant to be the Christian norm, as St Paul wrote in the Chapter before the one we heard. As far as it lies with you, live at peace with all'. That's hard but it is our calling: dissension should not be part of the Christian life.

So God is saying to us today, 'be content with what I have given you. If someone else has more, follow the Gospel teaching and rejoice with him. And in every way you can, build peace within your family and friends, within this Church and in the wider world. Both of these require quite a lot of

doing, but both will set forward the purposes of God and clothe us with the Lord Jesus Christ. Whereas dissension and jealousy will not.

AMEN

27.11.16