

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost – Epistle

The Difference Between Night and Day

Romans 13:8-14

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 18)

Analysis by Steven Albertin

8 Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 The 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.” 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

11 Besides 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; 12 the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; 13 let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. 14 Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

DIAGNOSIS: THE NIGHT

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *The Persistent*

Darkness

Just as each day inevitably turns to evening, just as light always becomes darkness, Christians are unable to shake darkness from their lives. Contrary to the pietistic claims of progress and perfection, the works of darkness (v. 12) persist. Our culture is all too quick to remind us that we are “only human.” No one is perfect. We all fail to love others as we ought. The “Dr. Lauras” of the world are quick to point out how our second-table-decalogue righteousness (v. 9) never measures up. We may have thought that we could keep our carousing (v. 13) hidden in the darkness but sooner or later we all get exposed. Just when we were getting comfortable in the darkness and enjoying our nap (v. 11), the shrill harangues of the moralists wake us up with their irritating criticisms.

Step 2: Advance Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *The Heart of Darkness*

The problem is not just our bad behavior and our failure to keep those second table commandments (vv. 9, 12, 13). The real problem is exposed by the first table of the decalogue and its exposure of our unfaith. Our heart is ultimately a heart of darkness, imprisoned by the desires of the flesh (v. 14). Those desires not only entice us into wanting to live life on our own terms but also to do it without God. The fact that we never can shake that feeling that we always “owe” (v. 8) someone and that we always feel obligated to the demands of moralists and their humanitarian appeals to the Golden Rule (v. 9) indicates a deeper internal problem. We have hearts that can never be at rest. We have consciences that are never fully at peace. Our sleep is always being disturbed. We sought refuge in the darkness but now we are embarrassed by it because it reveals the real problem: Our hearts of darkness do not “fear, love and trust God” above all things.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *The Hour of Darkness*

Paul senses that time is of the essence (v. 11). The darkness is about to end. The criticism of the moralists (who, after all, are created in the image of God!) is also the God's criticism. Their criticism is also a foreshadowing of the Final Criticism. We, who are trying to enjoy our sleep, despise this sounding of the alarm. We fear what the first rays of light breaking the horizon will bring, i.e., exposure of not only of our works of darkness but also our hearts of darkness and our utter disregard for God. Such exposure is dangerous and deadly, eternally deadly, because God is the One who is coming to wake us up. God is not thrilled with those who prefer the darkness. You can't spend your life in bed. But if you don't want to wake up and get dressed, God will make sure you stay asleep, permanently and eternally.

PROGNOSIS: THE DAY

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *But The Daylight Is Good!*

But God does not take delight in putting people to sleep, permanently and eternally. Therefore, God in Jesus Christ joins us in the darkness and suffers on the cross the criticism and exposure of the daylight "for us and our salvation." Thus, the coming of the dawn is radically different from the night. Contrary to what we feared, the daylight is good news. The scalding exposure of the light has been transformed. Jesus has been raised from the dead. For those who cling to Jesus, God's criticism is ended and the judgment is silenced. Put on Christ (v. 14) and we will be dressed for the daylight. And God will smile at us as if we were his Son.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *Dressed for the Daylight*

Paul urges us to change our clothes, to shed our pajamas and put on Christ (v. 14). Through this baptismal imagery Paul invites

us to trust what God has done for us in Christ. Trusting in Christ, we trust in God and find ourselves keeping what seemed impossible to keep, i.e., the first table of the decalogue. Covered by Christ and his righteousness, there is no longer any need to hide in the darkness. We are no longer ashamed. We can love ourselves (v. 9) because God has loved us first. And that changes everything. Nothing is the same because now the day is different from the night.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *Armed With Light*

Living in the light is no piece of cake. If anything, it resembles warfare (v. 12). The darkness always lurking to overwhelm our faith in Christ and drive us back into the darkness. The flesh still tempts us to gratify its desires (v. 14). But because we have put on Christ, we know that we are well dressed, well armed (v. 12) and ready to conduct our warfare against the powers of the darkness. It is a privilege and an honor (v. 13). There is nothing to hide. Living this way is a “get to” because we know that we are covered with Christ and have nothing to fear. When the day arrives and we are exposed, we know that we are covered. Because of God’s love for us in Christ, we can love ourselves and therefore are able to love our neighbor (v. 8). Second table decalogue righteousness becomes a possibility (v. 9). Loving our neighbor and keeping the commandments is now no more an obligation than it is to honor (v. 13) the one we love. Living like this is so unlike living under the power of the darkness where we are constantly worried, afraid and ashamed. Having put on Christ and the armor of light, we are free to love one another (v. 8). Yes, living in the light and being dressed in Christ is as different as the night is from the day!