Romans 13:14 Instead, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ….

 Yes, it is the Advent season again. For those of you who remember your Catechism instructions, you would recall that Advent is the beginning of the church year. Our church year is divided into two sections, the Festival half and the non-festival half. During the festival half we spend our time reviewing the life of our Lord and Savior Jesus and during the non-festival half we spend our time speaking of the impact and wonder of Jesus in our lives. It all starts with Advent.

 It is a word that means: “Coming.” During Advent we will speak of Jesus’ coming in two ways. First, that he has come to our world as that infant whose birth we celebrate at Christmas and second that he will come again as the Lord of All to end this world and start a new heaven and earth, a perfect place where Jesus and all who believed in him will spend eternity together. Following the season of Advent you then have Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost. It is the Sundays after Pentecost that form the non-festival half of the Church year. And just so you know, you can usually tell what part of the church year you are in because of the color of the altar cloths and the symbols found on them.

 As you dig into the history of the Christian church you find that somewhere in the 1st and 2nd Centuries is when and where this “church year” got its start. Personally, I think it has been a wonderful blessing to the Church because it keeps the focus and worship of the Church on Jesus and what He is all about. After all, once we turn away from Jesus and the redemption He has won, what is left? Without Jesus and his redemption all that is left is the works of the Law. Then church is nothing more than a place where we are to learn do this and don’t do that, live this way, be that way. In other words, once we take Christ and His work away we are left with nothing more than work-righteousness, which is the basis for every single religion out there that doesn’t have Jesus.

 That may just be the problem with modern Christianity. Many religions spend all their time telling you how to live the right life, how to earn from your God whatever end your God has promised. What most hear in Christian churches really doesn’t differ from what you might hear in any other church of the world. Live this way, do this, be that, bring this, fulfill that, wear this, eat that, don’t eat that…it goes on and on. If we teach works and only works, then no wonder the world doesn’t think that the Christian faith is anything special! Works, works, works! And if that is all that faith is, then what a waste of time and effort. Because how will you ever know if you have been good enough, if you have been right enough to get the gift of eternal life and heaven?

 This morning as we begin the new church year, let’s start by talking about how the Christian faith is different, different from all the other religions of the world. Remember what I have told you in the past. There are really only two religions in the world: the religion of work righteousness and the true and grace filled salvation of Jesus. Our theme for today will be: CLOTHED WITH JESUS!

 Now, if you were not paying attention, then you might actually think that all this text is talking about is what we must do or not do. If you think that true, then you missed a great deal of what has been said. It is true, that we are in a section of God’s Word where “sanctification” in the narrow sense is being spoken of. What that means is that we are speaking of the work the Holy Spirit does in us that leads us to hate sin and desire to lead lives pleasing to God. But sanctification in the narrow sense can only and must only follow after sanctification in the wider sense. In the wider sense the word means: “called out of the unbelieving world to faith in Jesus.” It is the word that tells you that you were blind but now you see, you were dead but now you are alive, you were lost but now you are found. Yes, our chapter 13 is one that is emphasizing the impact of Jesus on your life but bear in mind that the Book of Romans just spent 11 chapters telling you what Jesus was about in the first place. That’s where we will start.

 So yes, clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ. Who is this Jesus? The very Son of God and the Savior of the world. Jesus is the one, whose first coming into this world we are preparing to celebrate in a few weeks, that wonderful season of Christmas. No, it is really not about the lights and trees, the gifts and giving. It is about the birth of God’s son into our world. How a virgin named Mary, through the work of the Holy Spirit, was found with child and that child is the Son of God. Yes, God become man! That baby was born and with that birth angels appeared and announced his birth and sang to his glory! Obviously, Jesus is no ordinary child.

 This Jesus was then raised in obscurity, in a life where he was confronted by every temptation and yet was without sin. This Jesus then began a ministry whereby he spoke God’s Word, clarified the wonders of God’s promises and even fulfilled every one of God’s promises concerning His Son. And then the perfect and holy Jesus, the one who demonstrated his godhood by the miracles and wonders he did, this Jesus in fulfillment of God’s Word went to the cross and suffered the wrath of God the Father for all the sins of all the world. Jesus paid for our sins. The perfect Son of God became sin for us that we might have the gift of forgiveness and eternal life. And all that God asks of us is that we have faith in his Son. But right there, might be the thing we must think of most.

 Our text told us “clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ.” So what does it mean to “clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ?” Should we wear only clothing like he had on: sandals, robes and headdress just like Jesus in 29 A.D. of ancient Israel? Should we eliminate buttons and zippers, Velcro and snaps because Jesus had no such things? And only certain, dull, stripy colors should be ours? Is this command for a physical thing, a work of our hands, an opportunity to show how much we love Jesus? Is this a command of works?

 Dear people, even the context shows us that this clothing and putting on is a spiritual thing. And this spiritual thing has two distinct sides to it. The first side is this: that we immerse ourselves, hide ourselves, imagine ourselves Jesus. Here is the truth of faith. To clothe yourself with Jesus is to have faith, true and genuine faith in Jesus and what he is. See the world as Jesus saw it. Believe what Jesus said and did. Believe in how, what and why it all happened. That’s what this phrase first means. That we have true and genuine faith in Jesus.

 I hate to confess this but when I was thinking of an illustration the first thing to popped into my head was Bozo the Clown. When would you agree that I was imitating Bozo? When I just dye my hair orange? Or would it be when I had on a wig with a white bald spot in the middle and bright orange hair shooting out on both sides like the prows of ship? Would you think I was clothed like Bozo if I had on a blue one piece outfit? How about if I had a one piece blue outfit with a big wide red sash around my waist? Should I then add big fuzzy white balls where all the buttons should be? I want you to just explore that thought in your head. At what point of dress do you think: “that is clown like” and at what point of dress do you think: “That looks like Bozo!” Now put this into a spiritual context and think of your Savior Jesus. At what point is your faith just “you’re looking religious?” Or is your faith just “kind of Christ like?” Seriously, at what point would you say “I am clothed with the Lord Jesus Christ!” Do you see what I am driving at? Is your faith fully in Him and on Him as God and Lord and Savior of all or is it just a “I am religious” or “I follow Jesus, a good guy” kind of thing? Is our faith one of “clothed with the Lord Jesus Christ?”

 Because that is the issue here. Once that faith, clothed with the Lord Jesus Christ is, all of these other things will be too. You will wake up from your sleep. You will put away the deeds of darkness and put on the weapons of light. You will walk decently as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual sin and wild living, not in strife and jealousy. You will be and do all of this simply because you are clothed with the Lord Jesus Christ.

 And why? That goes right back to our very first line in this reading: “**And do this since you understand the present time.”** When these words were written to the Romans already there was tremendous persecution of the Christian faith going on. It was possible that you could and would lose your property and home, spouse and children and all things, yes, even your life just because you were a follower of Jesus. Yes, the times were perilous. But did you catch the words that tell you that you should not wait around until you hear the knock of the enemy at your door? You are to understand the present time. That word refers to the larger picture of this world and its life. But the passage then goes on and says, **“It is already the hour for you to wake up from sleep, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is almost over, and the day is drawing near.”**

 Those words tell us that while we are to take in the bigger picture of this world and its life we most certainly also need to pay attention to the “hour” that is right here and now. Jesus isn’t just for later, Jesus is for now. Jesus isn’t someone that should be put off until a better time, but that hour for faith and for having Jesus as a part of your life is right now! You can grasp that these words have an urgency to them. And I can fully understand why.

 In our Lutheran circles we like to speak of something called “the time of grace.” By that phrase we mean the life that God has given us to hear of, know and believe in Jesus. But when is your time of grace going to end? Can you guarantee me that you will be around 10 years from now? How about 5 years? 1 year? How about 6 months? 1 week? Tomorrow? Such is the world we live in. If you are honest with yourself you grasp how fast it all goes and how one day this or that is here and the very next day it is gone. The same with our lives. Why just yesterday I was your newly installed Pastor fresh from the Seminary and today we are together for 37 years! Are you willing to take the chance that “tomorrow” is the time for putting on the clothing of Jesus, tomorrow is the time to begin to believe and follow him, tomorrow is the time I will pay attention and grasp the lesson and wonder of the cross of Jesus?

 Don’t get lost in the ways of the world. The world is “asleep,” and doesn’t grasp the passing of time and the call for faith now. The world revels in the deeds of darkness. It does not grasp the importance of Jesus. It doesn’t care about a Savior or about what God has decreed or said. In its darkness the world thinks that Jesus, the Bible, the truth of God and the message of the cross to be nothing. It is a myth, a lie, a backward, foolish, silly thing that modern man does not need. Now do you grasp the call to “wake up?” Now do you understand the urgency of “it is already the hour?”

 My dear people, souls precious to the Lord, hear this call to faith. Think of what our Savior has done and accomplished for us, the awesome and wonderful gift He has given as the victorious and risen Jesus from the dead. Think of his marvel and the utter joy of eternal life He grants and supplies simply because you have believed and in that faith you follow Him. I know, our clothing of Jesus is often stained and torn, shabby and in need of mending, that’s not the issue. The issue here is that you have faith in Jesus and his forgiveness of sins and He will grant all else. To God be the glory! Amen.