

Date: 4th September 2011

Sermon: Rev Dr André Groenewald

Reading: Romans 13: 8-14

⁸ Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet,"^a and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbour as yourself."^b ¹⁰ Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

¹¹ And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. ¹⁴ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Background to the reading

Paul wrote a letter to the Christians in Rome, which was the capitol of the Roman Empire, from Corinth.

Rome was a typical worldly city with different nations living together. Its population is estimated to have been between six hundred thousand and one million in the first century. Rome was built on seven hills along the east bank of the Tiber River, twenty-two miles from its mouth. Paul spent two years under house arrest in Rome and years later was imprisoned again, awaiting execution.

The Jews were once expelled from Rome by the emperor Claudius. According to Acts Christians were also expelled during this time. It could be that the Roman officials by this time did not differentiate between Christians and Jews, perhaps because the Christian community was not large enough to be significant. Later this would change when Claudius' adopted son Nero accused the "Christians" of a fire that devastated Rome in 64 AD. The Christians must have been quite a large crowd to draw the attention of the emperor. It was also the start of the execution of Christians in Rome that lasted from 64 until 66 AD. There is an early tradition that puts the martyrdom of both Paul and Peter in Rome about this time. While we have a record of Paul's arrival and two-year stay in Rome (Acts 28:16-31), there is no mention in the [NT](#) of when Peter got there or how long he remained.

The church itself consisted of both Jews, and Gentiles and most of the issues Paul addresses in this letter, concerned both groups. The church in Rome was not founded by Paul and he, prior to his imprisonment in Rome, never visited the city. He always had plans to go but it never came to realization. Paul's first known contact with the people of Rome was when he met Aquila and Priscilla at Corinth. This couple were expelled from Rome in the time of Claudius. In his greeting he mentioned a considerable circle of Christians in Rome. The references to

households in several places suggest that these were house churches of the Roman Christian church.

In his letter to the church in Rome he gave the Christians in Rome a clear interpretation of what their faith in the salvation of Jesus Christ is all about. In our reading there is no exception.

He addresses one of the issues that existed within the first century church namely THE position of the “Jewish” law in their salvation. It was a fiercely debated issue between the converted Jews and the converted Gentiles. Paul explains and solves the issue in an early chapter where he speaks about the difference between Christ and Adam. The Law of God is a symbol of what Israel could not achieve namely full obedience to the will of God. Everyone that stood under the LAW knows through the Law their disobedience and rebellion against God. Those who are not familiar with the LAW namely the converted Gentiles stand under a new LAW namely the LAW of love as Christ summarized it. And both groups are united in Christ and stand under the obligation of love. Paul says in the first verse that when they LOVE they have fulfilled the full LAW. But this love is not just a feeling – it is committed sacrificial love. It is Love that seeks no return that does not boast and Love that overpowers all negativity and destruction.

He then goes on saying that they must live their faith like people who have seen the light of Christ’s salvation. It seems evident that the early church and Paul had a view that the world’s end is quite near and because of that the need to be ready and alert! They need to be prepared. He uses a metaphor of day and night to describe their situation. Although it is still night the day (the end time) is approaching fast. They must therefore wake up and be ready when the first sunlight appears. They are people who are different because they have a new focus now namely Jesus Christ!

Sermon

Have you ever experienced the embarrassment of turning up at a function and realising that you are not properly dressed for the occasion?

Well I think this has probably happened to most of us. It is as if you wish the earth would open up and let you disappear. It is a dreadful feeling.

When I thought about this analogy it dawned on me that it is exactly why we as Christians sometimes feel uneasy and uncomfortable, especially if we “clothe” ourselves with Christ! It is as if we are at a party with swimming costumes while the rest are in evening gowns or in the analogy of Paul, wearing “day clothes” while everyone else is in their pyjamas.

As Christians we are supposed to be uncomfortable in this world. I think that is exactly what Paul was trying to tell the congregation in Rome. They must live the Good News of Jesus’ Gospel to all people. They must love just as God loved the world. They must do His will as He summarised the Law in the Gospels namely to love Him and the neighbour like they love themselves.

We need to do the same. We need other people to see we wear different but appropriate clothes, fitting to our faith. Through faith alone we became followers of God. We need to travel light because this world is not our destiny. We are merely passing through. We do not need pockets to store material things. We do not need fancy clothing because God gave us already the hope of the everlasting life. We do not need raincoats for a rainy day because we trust Him. We do not need special footwear because He will help us to walk over hills and mountains. We do not need special gloves to handle the problems of this world because He will guide us through his Holy Spirit. We do not need warm jackets to feel warm and cosy because He will let the fires of faith burn in our hearts through His Holy Spirit.

We have already received all that we need through the redemption of Jesus Christ, faith, hope and love. Believing and trusting in God alone in any situation. We need to share the Love of God with all people. But listen carefully: I did not say **OUR LOVE** but God's love that goes beyond any human understanding. It is Love that is not based on feelings or emotions but rooted in a commitment to serve and sacrifice beyond any call of duty. I am talking of the LOVE where God saved us all, pardoned all our sins and transgressions, gave us the hope of a new kingdom and helps us each and every moment of everyday with all that we need through his Holy Spirit.

If we feel uncomfortable because people are staring at us while we are "clothed" differently, then we must be witnesses of the grace, mercy and love of God. Then we must see all the critique in a different light. They are the ones who are wearing pyjamas while we are already clothed in the garments of glory.

Maybe that is how we need to look at ourselves. We are "clothed" in Jesus Christ, meaning through faith we received His full pardon and redemption which He shares with us every moment of every day through His Holy Spirit. We are part of His new kingdom. Let us, metaphorically, take off any clothing that is a reminder of the night. I think it is time that we wear spiritual clothing that signifies our faith and hope and love in our Lord and Saviour.

Amen