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Advent is a season of light – I’ve always thought of the twinkling of the winter stars and the candles and Christmas lights that often decorate the church, my own living room, and the houses I drive past on my way home from campus. However, after spending some time with the Advent readings for this week, perhaps a different kind of light is more appropriate. Listen to the text from Romans 13: 11-14: “The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. *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.* Let us behave decently as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothes yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.” When I hear this text, I don’t picture warm, comforting Christmas lights, but the twilight hours of dawn before the sun rises over the rim of the horizon. This kind of light awakens and calls us to work. We are to put on the armor of light – to go to the dark places and live rightly, clothing ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Putting on an armor of light is our calling in this first week of advent as we lit the first candle of Hope or Expectation. The texts are about the future, the expected messiah and the hope for his coming. There is tension in the waiting and the expecting. The Lord is coming, but what are we to do to prepare? How can we set aside the deeds of darkness? The dawn is approaching. The light is being thrown across the sky. In my experience, any sort of preparation or impending task is akin to near chaos. I can make my lists, set my priorities, make my goals and timeline, but then to go about the task of preparing and worrying about the expected event causes a great deal of tension. What is expected is not yet here; it is not yet known. How can we live as in the light when we are still in the dark? There is a tension between what is and what is to come. We cannot know the splendor of the sun when we are left in the dimness before the dawn.

Sometimes I get caught up in a cycle of darkness that I often set myself up for. This is what happens when I try to be light: I see the end is approaching, and realize there is much for me to prepare for, and I especially feel the dragon breathing down my neck – finals week. As I am preparing for finals and writing massive research papers, nothing overlaps, and a sense of being overwhelmed is easy to come by. In the stress of upcoming finals, I have prepared my *list*. I have all of my assignments listed for the rest of the semester, papers, due dates, and what priority number they are assigned. I get excited when I can cross an item off my list and the dawn seems closer, but I know there is another list looming in the distance. I have to do my Christmas shopping, pack and prepare for my J-term trip, prepare somehow for student teaching, graduation, find a job, finish planning my wedding, and the list only throws me deeper into the darkness. It is so easy to get lost in the dirge of the lists. They seem to lull me farther away from the light.

And then, in the middle of it all, I hear the words of the text for today. “Wake up! The day is almost here!” “Let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob...” *This is what God is doing.* Peoples’ disputes will be settled and “they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks...” Isaiah is calling me, is calling all of us to

“Walk in the light of the Lord.” A daunting task – perhaps. I know that I am lost in the darkness. I have no idea where to start to be lifted out from underneath my own oppression and sorrow. I know that in this Advent season, I should be tense with expectation and the hope for our Lord’s coming. He is coming. He was born and shared in the stresses of human living. He knows our needs, desires, fears, and pains. He is the light that may only be a glimmer, but his light can arm us against any darkness.

What comfort is there in this! God knows our darknesses, and he can be our light. He is coming to our aide and will be our judge and our arbiter. He will settle our disputes so we can turn our swords into plowshares so that we may prepare the ground for the sowing. He can turn our spears into pruning hooks to prepare the trees for a harvest of fruit. Our hope is in him and his coming that we may be sowers and producers and not warriors. God in his son Jesus is our comforter and our redeemer. He is coming to bring us peace, and in his coming we have hope. In him is the light so that we may bear it to the world. And there is freedom and promise. God is the light; it is not something we have to muster up for ourselves. God frees us to carry it with us as he promises to be faithful and provide the light to us.

Now, I wouldn’t be a senior if I didn’t respond to the question, “How then, do we live” in response to God’s light and his coming? How then, do I serve?

In the scheme of things, we are the torchbearers. We are the luminaries to light the way for the coming of Christ. They mystery of God is that he came, died, and is coming again. We are bearing his light into the world, and by doing so together, we can bring light to every corner of darkness. I don’t know how many of you have seen the youtube video for the song “Where’s the line to see Jesus?” My mom emailed it to me this past week, and I have been enchanted by its message. The story behind the song is this: “While at the mall a couple of years ago, the singer’s then four year old nephew, Spencer, saw kids lined up to see Santa Claus. Having been taught as a toddler that Christmas is the holiday that Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus, he asked his mom, "where's the line to see Jesus"? My sister mentioned this to my dad, who immediately became inspired and jotted words down to a song in just a few minutes.” This family then proceeded to write music for this song and has adamantly been trying to get it recorded and produced. The lyrics are simple and profound:

Christmas time was approaching, the snow is starting to fall,
Shoppers choosing their presents, people filling the mall,
Children waiting for Santa with excitement and glee.
A little boy tugged my sweater, looked up and asked me,

Where's the line to see Jesus? Is He here at the store?
If Christmas time is His birthday, why don't we see Him more?
Where's the line to see Jesus? He was born for me.
Santa Claus brought me presents, but Christ gave His life for me.

As I stood in amazement at this message profound,
I looked down to thank him, he was no where around.
The little boy at the mall might as well have had wings

As the tears filled my eyes, I thought I heard him say,
 Where's the line to see Jesus? Is He here at the store?
 If Christmas time is His birthday, why don't we see Him more?
 Where's the line to see Jesus? He was born for me.
 Santa Claus brought me presents, but Christ gave His life for me.

This is the hope of advent. Jesus is coming; we will see him. Like children, we can wait in expectation and joyful hope of his coming. And as we wait, we spread his light.

I don't know how many of you have attended a candle light service – churches often have them on Christmas Eve, and a part of the service involves lighting candles and passing them on. Aside from being very Kumbayah, these services can be very beautiful and meaningful in showing the spreading of light. The problem is that when we leave the church, the light doesn't leave with us. We can talk about the spreading of light, but that does nothing if we don't do so out there, outside the doors of our homes and our churches. We are solving no problems here. We need to find the root of the problem and not merely treat the symptoms. We need to wake up. We need to look at creation for what it is and see the dark realities of racism, classism, grief, loneliness, starvation, poverty, and the list only grows longer. How many of us have sheltered someone from the recent freezing snow and rain? How many of us have shown our light to those we meet on the street? I'm not saying we have to stand on a street corner with or erect billboard signs proclaiming a message. I am saying that we can be courteous to those around us. We can make a difference in the life of one person each day. We can look out from under the shelter of our own lives and see the hurt and pain of the world. And then we need to reflect God's light.

Is there comfort in this calling? I'm not sure. It is not an easy burden and we cannot bear the light alone. There are things we can do, but then there are the things God has done and is doing. What *we* are being called to is a change, not only of mind, but of our behavior. How have you prepared for Christ today? It is daunting, and we cannot do this alone. We are not the light itself, only the bearers of it. Christ is by our side. Christ is the light and is doing great things in the world. He is faithful to his promises for peace and for sowing. The light is coming, and for his sake and for the sake of God's creation, we strive to bring light to the darkness in hope and expectation of the true light now dawning on the horizon. The day is coming! Surely it approaches! Our mission is this – we are expectant of God's coming and of his presence with us. We are called to solidarity with the poor, the poor in spirit, and all of creation. Christian is not only our name but our union *together* as the body of saints of God.

We are called together in this place of learning. Here we can explore the world and learn how to see the dark places. We can learn how to listen and observe that which we do not understand (which is most things). But the listening and the seeing are important. God's light gives us a lens through which we can see the created world. My lens is that of a daughter, a sister, a learner, and a teacher. This place has taught me how to more fully be each. In this place I have groped about to learn how to listen and see those around me. And God calls me to attention: I am not alone in this place. I am important, but am only a piece. My role is to connect to others and be a mirror to reflect the light of Christ. In learning how to be a teacher, one of the most promising things I have learned is that I am forever a student. My students and all those I encounter have a light

inside of them. They, for me, can be the light of God. I can learn from them important lessons of gratitude, humility, strength of heart, gentleness, and courage.

I have been and still am afraid of dark places. The darkness makes me feel alone and the unknown is not a friendly place. Yet, the world can often be this way and I often stumble about not knowing how to see. But I have this light. I have learned from my experience here that my light can draw in others, not by my preaching, but by my living kindness, concern, and empathy for others. You can be the light, too. In you, others can see a light. Put on that armor and let your light show knowing that your light is only a forerunner for the dawn of Christ to come. May we “wake up” to the tension of expectation and hope for the dawn.

Amen.