

Unpaid Debts; Refugee Sunday
Romans 13:11-14, 8-10
Westside Fellowship CRC; 6 May 2018
Rev. Heidi S. De Jonge

There are an awful lot of deeds of darkness in these verses. I mean, 'deeds of darkness' is kind of a metaphor for Paul in these verses, but it is also literally true that a lot of things he mentions here happen a bit more often at night than during the day. Crimes happen more often under the cover of night. Drinking to get drunk for some might be happening all the time, but for others, starts, perhaps in the daylight, but goes deeper into the night. Two thirds of reported rapes happen at night. Car thefts and car vandalism – at night. Stores leave their lights on after hours to deter those who might, under the cover of darkness, break in and steal.

There is something about night and the dark that makes us think we can get away with things. If this isn't quite ringing true for you and the sins of your life, think about the hiddenness of some of your sins... even if they are sins that happen in the day – what is it that you hide? When no one else is in the house? When the kids are in bed? After your spouse leaves for work? Whether it is the darkness of night or the darkness of a closed door, there are deeds there that we'd just as soon not have uncovered...

Now, Paul mentions a couple of interesting deeds of darkness that don't seem to fit into the hidden folds of night. In verse 13 – dissension and jealousy. These, interestingly, are daytime deeds... We'll call them "Daytime Deeds of Darkness"... Deeds that we often engage in the daytime, in full view of all, with little shame or cover whatsoever. Covetousness and envy drive us in some of the most obvious ways. And we justify dissension and divisiveness in the name of good things like holiness and purity and being set apart from the world.

And so for these two deeds that Paul mentions, I think the other metaphor he uses in this text is helpful... Sometimes we need to stop hiding in darkness and come into the light, and sometimes we need to *take off* the deeds of darkness and *put on* the armor of light. Dissension? Take it off! Jealousy? Take it off! Divisiveness? Take it off! Envy? Take it off!

You know this text is a pretty special text for one of the most famous Christ followers of all time. St. Augustine wrote about it in the story of his conversion. At the age of 31, while out in his yard, Augustine heard the voice of a child in a neighbouring yard saying in a sing-song

way, “Take and Read; Take and Read.” Because he could think of no children’s song or game that included those words, he concluded that God must be telling him to pick up the Bible and read whatever verse his eye landed on. And these are the verses he read: Romans 13:13-14 – “Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing 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 flesh.” And this was the turning point of the rest of his life.

Take off the deeds of darkness – like sports uniforms drenched with sweat – like dress shoes that have been pinching your feet all day – like an outfit you try on at the mall that just Does Not Fit. Like clothes that have been muddied in a rainstorm. Take them off.

And put on the armour of light and clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, the metaphors in this text! Yes! Put on the armour of light and clothe yourself with Jesus Christ.

Back in the early church, new Christians who had just been baptized were clothed in bright white robes to symbolize their having died and risen with Christ – to symbolize their cleansing – to symbolize their union with Christ. In a parallel text, Paul writes, “for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Galatians 3:27).

I wonder, sometimes, what we think about when we think about putting on Christ... or putting on the armour of light. Sometimes, especially with the armour metaphor – it seems like a defensive kind of clothing. You put on armour to protect yourself from evil. Ephesians 6 tells us to put on the full armor of God in order to protect ourselves from the devil’s schemes (v. 11) and from the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil (v. 12). The armour of God protects us from the flaming arrows of the evil one (v. 16). Our armour is *protective* armour.

And sometimes I think when we talk about putting on Christ, we limit it to what it says in the first part of Romans 13:13, “Let us behave decently.” Protect yourself from evil and be decent. Behave yourself. Be a good girl. Be a good boy. Or, perhaps, Don’t Be Naughty. As long as I don’t do all these naughty things like carousing and getting drunk – or being jealous or divisive... as long as I mind my p’s and q’s, I will live decently and this will be my putting on of Christ.

I'm not sure that's all that Paul is saying.

Augustine once said, "The world is a great book, of which they that never stir from home read only a page." This is a broad and expansive invitation to exploring the world... and I would say that this applies to Scripture as well, and I'm sure Augustine would agree. Although it only took those couple of verses to convert him to Christianity, he would also say, "Scripture is a great book, of which they that narrow down the putting on of Christ to being decent gals and fellows, read only a page."

Let's look at Romans 13:8-10 where we find the call to love. All the "shalt-nots" in verses 11-14 and all the "shalt-nots" in the 10 commandments are summed up, focused, and fulfilled with the work of love. In other words, when we put on Christ, we aren't just putting on the not-sinching-ness of Jesus, we are putting on the *love* of Jesus. "The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not covet,' and *whatever other command there may be*, are summed up in this one command: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'" (Romans 13:9).

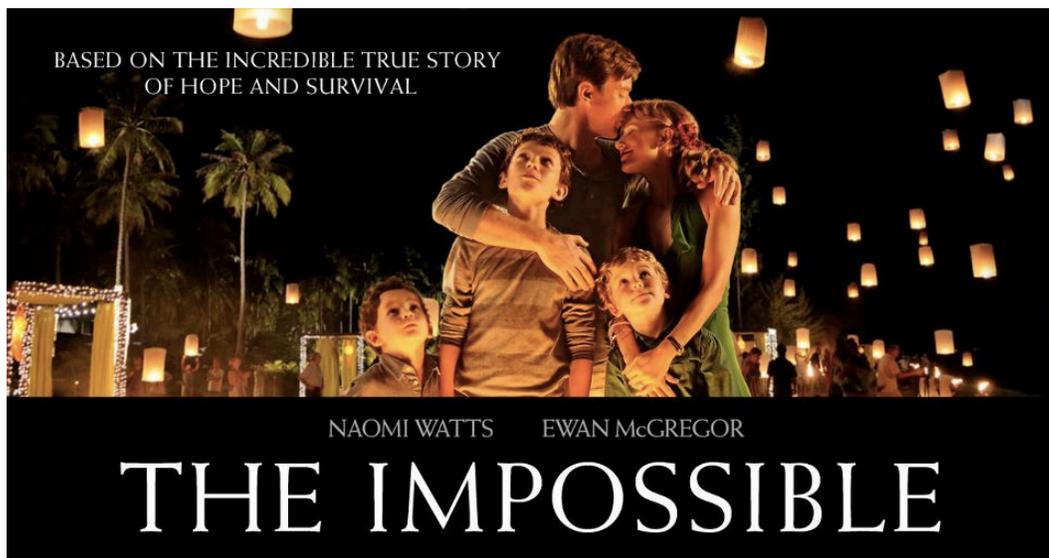
When you look closely at the armour of light which is the armour of love, you'll notice that it is not just defensive armour, but that it is the kind of clothing that goes on the offense with love. When you look closely at the armour of light which is the armour of love, you'll notice that it is not just the white of unstained purity, but the brilliant colours of all the kinds and ways of love that God calls out of us.



In some ways, love sounds simple – maybe even simplistic! Well, it’s true that love is simple – everything you ever needed to know about it you probably learned (at least the seeds of) in kindergarten. Share. Speak kindly. Include others. Defend those who are being hurt. Hold hands when you cross the street to keep each other safe.

But as simple as these things sound, they are not easy to achieve. In fact, they are impossible to do completely and on our own.

Speaking of Impossible, I watched a film last week by that name. Or, “The Impossible”, rather.



It’s the true story of a family who visited Thailand back in December of 2004. Maria and Henry – the parents. Lucas, Thomas, and Simon – the children. On Boxing Day, 2004, the family was playing in the pool at the resort, when the wind picked up... First you see the palm trees start to bend down, then the waters came. A wave from the Indian Ocean roared onto the shore. A devastating tsunami.

Maria (the mother) and her oldest son impossibly survive – nearly getting swept away from each other multiple times.



But they find each other and manage to hold on to each other. Injured. Bleeding. Exhausted. Believing the rest of their family is dead. They start slogging through the sewage infested paths, looking for help. And then they hear a cry. A child crying. “What was that?” Maria asks. And Lucas says, “No, Mom! We have to keep going! We have to get help for us! We can’t stop to help him!” And she says, “What if that boy who is crying were your brother and someone else were deciding whether to help him or not.” And Lucas says, “my brothers are dead!” And you watch the tragedy sink in to Maria’s mother’s heart. And then she says, with a resolve that will follow me for a long time, “Lucas, even if it’s the last thing we do...” And they go and they find the little boy and rescue him from where he was caught.

Even if this is the last thing we do... In this line is the spirit of Romans 13:8. “Let no debt remain outstanding.” In other words, pay your debts – make sure you are settled up... Except one thing... “except the continuing debt to love one another.” There is an outstanding debt that we can never finish paying, even up to the very last things that we do with our lives. And that is the debt to love. We can never say, “I am all done loving. I have finished. I have accomplished it. I have won the race of love. There is no more love to give. I have crossed it off my bucket list.”

This is to be the way we live, when we put on the clothing of Christ, because this is the way that Jesus lives. This is the way of the life of God. When Jesus said, “It is finished!” on the cross – the debts for sin were paid, but the debt of love never settled up. The love is never finished. It is ever-expanding. Ever-giving. Ever-growing. For you. For me. And through you and through me.

This love that you have for the Lord and others might look like rescuing a child in a tsunami – but probably not. It certainly looks like the work of our Friends of Refugees team. And their work is simply moment upon moment of simple acts of showing up and being there for the Mwajuma/Selamani family... It looks like the work of the Special Meals team at St. Andrews.

[Showed video of man helping his wife on the beach by moving her and the chairs slowly, giving her chances to rest in between short walks.]¹

Whether rescuing people in a tsunami – or bringing a family from a refugee camp – or moving a chair, bit by bit across a sandy shore.

[In transition to communion...]

I was at a one-day retreat in January, led by Dale Cooper, former chaplain of Calvin College. And multiple times throughout the day, Dale said this: “Too few times – always one too few – have you heard God saying, I love you. And too few times – always one too few – have you said to Jesus, I love you, too.” We can never get enough of God’s love. We can never give enough of God’s love back to him and to the world.

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/beulah.chandler/videos/10159258092950015/>

And here is an article about the man and the woman who caught his act of love on video:

<http://www.cbc.ca/radio/docproject/from-viral-video-to-unexpected-friendship-1.4626771/how-a-viral-video-brought-two-strangers-together-just-when-they-needed-each-other-most-1.4626772>