

"I am! Praise! Put on! the Lord!"

OT: Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 149:1-5, 9c  
NT: Romans 13:8-14

## Read Romans 13:8-14

There is a story told about Jesus wandering around Jerusalem when he decided that he really needed a new robe. After looking around for a while, he saw a sign for Finkelstein, the tailor. So, he went in and made the necessary arrangements to have Finkelstein prepare a new robe for him. A few days later, when the robe was finished, Jesus tried it on -- and it was a perfect fit! Jesus asked how much he owed, and Finkelstein brushed him off: "No, no, no, for the Son of God there's no charge!

"However," Finkelstein said, "may I ask for a small favor? Whenever you give a sermon, perhaps you could just mention that your nice new robe was made by Finkelstein, the tailor?" Jesus readily agreed and as promised, extolled the virtues of his Finkelstein robe whenever he spoke to the masses.

A few months later, while Jesus was again walking through Jerusalem he happened to walk past Finkelstein's shop and noted a huge line of people waiting for Finkelstein's robes. Jesus pushed his way through the crowd to speak to him and as soon as Finkelstein spotted Jesus he said: "Jesus, Jesus, look what you've done for my business! Would you consider a partnership?"

"Certainly," replied Jesus. "Jesus & Finkelstein it is." "Oh, no, no," said Finkelstein. "Finkelstein & Jesus. After all, I am the craftsman." The two of them debated this for some time. Their discussion was long and spirited, but ultimately fruitful -- and they finally came up with a mutually acceptable compromise.

A few days later, the new sign went up over Finkelstein's shop:  
**LORD AND TAILOR...** And now you know the rest of the story!

The story I just shared helps bring to the surface, subtly, three main themes for today: God's declaration as Lord, praising the Lord, and putting on the Lord Jesus Christ.

To unpack God's declaration as Lord, I want to revisit briefly a story included in our lectionary texts today. It can be found in Exodus 12 and is the first institution of the Passover. In the twelfth verse God says, "I am the Lord." At this point in Exodus, the gods of Egypt are wishing to continue taking on God. Moses has presented himself as God's chosen and asked Pharaoh

to let God's people go or there would be a series of plagues to come upon them. The gods of Egypt tested God and so God sent a series of plagues upon them. Exodus 11 informs us that the last plague was about to be issued, the striking down of all the first borns, both human beings and animals, and that on all the gods of Egypt God will execute judgments. Why? Because God is the Lord. God is the master and ruler who has the ultimate power, authority, and influence over all the earth. The plagues were not meant for God's people, the Israelites, so God sent a message to them. For those who knew God and called God Lord the message was an invitation with instruction. Mark your homes with the blood of the lamb so it is clear who is devoted to me and I will protect you. And don't just sit there and wait but get ready. Do your part to prepare for my coming! As the Israelites participate in the Passover meal, they are to do so hurriedly, and they are to do so dressed and ready to travel. The Lord God is coming to free them from their bondage and they must be ready to go.

Theme one: God is Lord. There is none like God. And for all that God is and does (power, authority, protection, deliverance, salvation), we are to declare God as Lord and follow God as the Lord.

Our declaration of God as Lord leads us then to our second theme, praising the Lord. Psalm 149, along with several other psalms, repeatedly calls for the praising of the Lord. One of the first things to note in reference to praising is who is called to praise. Psalm 149 answers this with "the faithful". The faithful, or the pious, are those who declare God as Lord of all and are devoted to God's cause. It is these who will praise the Lord because they are those marked by the blood of the lamb, both literally as we discussed in Exodus 12 and spiritually as those who are saved by the blood of Jesus. Another thing Psalm 149 reminds us to note is why the faithful are to praise the Lord. We are called to praise the Lord because God is good. God's goodness to Israel was measured by God's favor, which means victory and protection from enemies. And another thing Psalm 149 reminds us to note is how we are to praise the Lord. The psalmist calls us into a spirit and act of dancing, singing, and make melodies in the streets, in battle, and even on the couch. That is right: "let them sing for joy on their couches". We are always to have a song of praise on our lips.

Theme one: God is Lord. Theme two: Praise the Lord. For God is good and shows favor in victory and protection and is worthy to be praised.

Once we declare God as Lord and praise the Lord, the third theme is to put on the Lord. This third theme comes from Romans, a letter Paul wrote to the Roman church emphasizing the importance for the Romans to prepare for the coming of the Lord and live accordingly. This portion of Romans begins with verses eight to ten which is a play on the word debt. The debt of taxes, which can be paid, recalls the debt of love, which can never be paid. To "owe no one

anything” is a double negative in the Greek and it emphasizes that believers should be debt-free except with respect to love. It is this text in which we are inspired to pray to God, “forgive us our debts (the love we owe to you and others) as we forgive our debtors (those who owe us love).” Then, in verses eleven to fourteen, Paul explicitly says “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” as a way to describe Christian discipleship in the practical metaphor of choosing to dress in a certain manner. In other letters, Paul talks about clothing yourself with kindness, humility, patience, and above all love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Getting dressed I think is something we can all relate to. It is something we do every day. Just like we choose a shirt, pants, a dress, shoes, a hat, jewelry, etc., we are to choose our attitudes and actions to match that of our Lord Jesus Christ. The way Paul charges the Romans is “to lay aside the words of darkness and put on the armor of light. To live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling or jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ”, who is the light of the world and not any of these other things.

I believe it is important to note here that we are not and cannot be our Lord Jesus Christ, whether we can buy and wear a robe exactly like his or not. To put on the Lord Jesus Christ is to do our best in following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ and doing things for Christ. The way I see it, God’s plan for the world involves human counterparts that are willing to share and show and spread the message of who God is. To be clear, it does not depend solely on what we do, but Jesus’ call for us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, just as he was, is abundantly clear. God is the Lord, worthy to be praised, and what an honor and opportunity we have to adorn and put on and represent God through whatever we say and do.

When thinking about doing God’s work, I don’t just think about embodying the Fruits of the Spirit. I think of doctors and nurses putting those fruits into action through their work to heal and cure and care. I think of grocery store clerks who help us find things in the store, check us out, help bag our groceries, and even carry our food to our cars at times. I think of teachers who kneel down to comfort a child who struggles with an assignment or falls on the playground and scrapes their knee. I think of the military, who in their own special ways, stand strong against enemies both foreign and domestic. I think of law enforcement and first responders who live to protect and respond in moments of crisis. I think of stay at home moms and dads who devote their daily schedule to raising children up in the way they should go and care for the little things around the house. I think of service organizations who work tirelessly to tend to the margins of society, not to enable, but to empower. I think of those who are willing to just be, listen, reflect, pray, and when given the opportunity, shine with a smile or a story.

One of my favorite stories embodies this last one beautifully and powerfully.

An old man, probably some ninety plus years, sat feebly on the park bench. He didn't move, just sat with his head down staring at his hands. When I sat down beside him he didn't acknowledge my presence and the longer I sat, I wondered if he was ok.

Finally, not really wanting to disturb him but wanting to check on him at the same time, I asked him if he was ok. He raised his head and looked at me and smiled. "Yes, I'm fine, thank you for asking", he said in a clear strong voice.

"I didn't mean to disturb you, sir, but you were just sitting here staring at your hands and I wanted to make sure you were ok", I explained to him.

"Have you ever looked at your hands", he asked. "I mean really looked at your hands?"

I slowly opened my hands and stared down at them. I turned them over, palms up and then palms down. No, I guess I had never really looked at my hands as I tried to figure out the point he was making.

Then he smiled and related this story: *"Stop and think for a moment about the hands you have, how they have served you well throughout your years. These hands, though wrinkled, shriveled, and weak have been the tools I have used all my life to reach out and grab and embrace life. They braced and caught my fall when as a toddler, I crashed upon the floor. They put food in my mouth and clothes on my back. As a child my mother taught me to fold them in prayer. They tied my shoes and pulled on my boots. They dried the tears of my children and caressed the love of my life. They held my rifle and wiped my tears when I went off to war. They have been dirty, scraped, and raw, swollen and bent. They were uneasy and clumsy when I tried to hold my newborn son. Decorated with my wedding band, they showed the world that I was married and loved someone special. They wrote the letters home and trembled and shook when I buried my parents and spouse and walked my daughter down the aisle. Yet, they were strong and sure when I dug my buddy out of a foxhole and lifted a plow off my best friend's foot. They have held children, consoled neighbors, and shook in fists of anger when I did not understand. They have covered my face, combed my hair, and washed and cleansed the rest of my body. They have been sticky and wet, bent and broken, dried and raw. And to this day, when not much of anything else of me works really well, these hands hold me up, lay me down, and again continue to fold in prayer. These hands are the mark of where I have been and the ruggedness of my life. But more importantly it will be these hands that God will reach out and take when he leads me home. And He will not care about where these hands have been or what they have done. What He will care about is to whom these hands belong and how much He loves these hands. And with these hands He will lift me to His side and there I will use these hands to touch the face of Christ."*

No doubt I will never look at my hands the same again. I never saw the old man again after I left the park that day, but I will never forget him and the words he spoke.

We are all called to use our God given hands to be the hands of God- whether our hands are young and able or old and strained. God continues to give us the opportunities to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.”

A hymn entitled “The Summons” (by John L. Bell & Graham Maule) came to mind as a call and response to God that I believe brings together our declaration to and faith in God as “the Lord”, our response to God’s goodness with “praise”, and our call to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.”

The hymn relays to us that God calls to us and asks:

*“Will you come and follow me if I but call your name? Will you go where you don't know and never be the same? Will you let my love be shown? Will you let my name be known, will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?”*

*Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name? Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same? Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare? Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?*

*Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name? Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same? Will you kiss the leper clean and do such as this unseen, and admit to what I mean in you and you in me?*

*Will you love the "you" you hide if I but call your name? Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same? Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around, through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?”*

And the hymn concludes with our response and continued prayer:

*“Lord your summons echoes true when you but call my name. Let me turn and follow you and never be the same. In Your company I'll go where Your love and footsteps show. Thus, I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.”*

The declaration of God as Lord is true. Our opportunity to praise the Lord is true. The Lord’s summons is true. The Lord’s desire to be in relationship and partnership with us is true. Our Lord is reaching out with his hands and heart. How about us? Are we reaching out with our hands and heart?

Let all God’s people say... Amen.