

Sunday, September 6, 2026
Sermon: "The Wearable Christ"
Romans 13:8-14 NRSV

Where we are going in today's message: Fashion advice from Paul tells us exactly what to wear each day.

You may have noticed that things we wear are getting smarter.

Not in the sense that our clothes know how to match our socks and shirt - we're still on our own there - but smarter in the technological sense. Watches track our heart rates. Rings and wristbands monitor our health and sleep patterns. Glasses can display directions or translate languages. You might even wear devices that measure blood sugar or remind you to stand up and move around. It won't be long before things we wear know more about us than our doctors do. Your watch will tell you how well you slept, how many steps you took, and how stressed you were during the church Council meeting.

Our clothes may not talk to us (yet), but things we wear are increasingly connected, responsive and full of information. In other words, what we wear is doing more than telling the time or helping us pass an eye test when we renew our driver's license. These accessories tell stories about who we are.

And it's not just technology. Every day we choose what we'll wear — clothes, jewelry and symbols that communicate something about us. A sports jersey says one thing. A business suit says another. A clerical collar says something else entirely.

We do the same thing online. We curate identities on social media the same way we assemble a wardrobe. We present a version of ourselves to the world.

So, before we walk out the door each morning, we decide, "What am I going to wear today?"

This makes the apostle Paul's words sound surprisingly modern. Writing to the Christians in Rome, Paul says that instead of living for yourselves, seeking pleasure and gratification, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 14).

Put on Christ. It's a striking image. Paul speaks about faith the way we speak about clothing. Just as we choose what to wear

before stepping into the world, Paul suggests that the most important decision we make each day is not what but who we put on.

Paul's command to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" might sound unusual at first, but the more you think about it, the more familiar the idea becomes.

Clothing has always communicated identity. A uniform tells you something about the person wearing it. A firefighter's coat signals danger and courage. A judge's robe signals authority. A wedding ring tells a story about commitment. What we wear shapes how we move through the world.

If you are wearing work clothes, you expect to work. If you are wearing formal clothes, you behave a little differently than you would in sweatpants and a T-shirt. Clothing doesn't just express identity; it reinforces it.

Paul understands that. That's why he talks about faith using the language of clothing.

When he tells believers to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ," he's not talking about fashion. He's talking about identity.

Earlier in this chapter, Paul speaks about everyday responsibilities: respecting authorities, paying taxes and living peaceably with others. These aren't heroic acts that make headlines. They are the ordinary habits of daily life.

His point is that discipleship shows up in the way we conduct ourselves in ordinary situations. The life of those who follow Jesus isn't something they keep tucked away inside their hearts. It is something worn out into the world where people can see it.

Every day, we step into the world wearing something. Paul simply asks: What identity are we wearing?

From there, Paul turns to what he calls the one debt that never disappears. "Owe no one anything," he writes, "except to love one another" (v. 8). The phrase is striking because most of us have debt. We pay the mortgage, car loan and credit card bill, and celebrate when the balance finally reaches zero.

But Paul says there is one debt that never reaches zero: Love, the Bible says is the only thing worth having. It's a cruel irony, isn't it? Every day, the balance remains outstanding. Love is the one obligation

that can never be fully paid off because every new day presents new opportunities to practice it.

Paul then reminds his readers of several commandments: do not commit adultery, murder, or theft and don't even think about coveting something a friend of yours might have. These familiar instructions, he says, all point toward a single reality: "love your neighbor as yourself" (v. 9).

Why? Because love does no harm to a neighbor. So love, sort of becomes the garment that holds everything else together. Without love, morality becomes a checklist. With love, it becomes a way of life. Love shapes the way we speak to people who disagree with us. It shapes how we treat those who have less power than we do, like the teenager at the second window of a burger joint drive-through, the cashier at the grocery store, the person answering customer service when we're already frustrated, or the neighbor who sees the world very differently than we do.

Love shapes how we respond when patience runs thin and irritation begins to rise. And people notice. They watch how those who claim to love God treat not only their friends but strangers or those in need. They watch how disagreements are handled. They watch whether kindness shows up when things get difficult.

In other words, they watch what we are wearing.

Paul's argument then takes an interesting turn. After speaking about love, he suddenly shifts to the language of time.

"You know what time it is," he says in verse 11.

Every culture lives by a clock. We schedule our lives according to the time of day. But Paul believes Christians live according to a deeper timetable. "The night is far gone," he writes. "The day is near" (v. 12). Paul imagines history like a long night beginning to give way to morning. The resurrection of Jesus is the first light breaking over the horizon. Believers, therefore, are people who dress for the morning.

Paul says we should "throw off the works of darkness" and "put on the armor of light" (v. 12). Night has its own wardrobe. Darkness prefers clothing suited for secrecy and excess. Creatures of the night like vampires or zombies come alive in the darkness and dress accordingly. They hide from the light. They move through the

shadows because daylight exposes what and who they are. Paul names some of those habits plainly: drunkenness, sexual immorality, quarreling and jealousy. These behaviors belong to the darkness of night.

The night can feel seductive. It promises freedom from restraint and the thrill of secrecy. But Paul insists that believers are not people who build their lives in the shadows. They belong to the daylight that is already beginning to dawn.

So, we who follow Jesus belong to the morning. We dress differently. We begin living now, according to the daylight that is coming. The church, then, becomes a community already dressed for the sunrise, while the rest of the world is still waking up.

All of this leads to Paul's central instruction: "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 14).

Notice Paul doesn't say to simply admire or agree with Christ. He says, "Put him on."

Christ becomes the garment. To wear Christ means allowing his character to shape our instincts and reactions. Clothing affects how we move. Heavy boots change how we walk. A uniform changes how we carry ourselves. In the same way, putting on Christ begins to shape how we live.

Paul now goes on to discuss manners by providing the following instruction: "Make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (v. 14). Bad form, indeed! The phrase "make provision" means planning ahead. We make provisions when we pack food for a trip or prepare for a storm.

Paul's warning is simple: Don't organize your life in ways that quietly make room for the very things that undermine the identity you claim to wear.

You cannot put on Christ while keeping another outfit ready in the closet. Discipleship means deciding which identity we will actually live in.

Before we leave the house each morning, we make a simple decision: what are we going to wear?

Sometimes the choice is easy. Sometimes it takes a little thought. But one way or another, we decide. Shirt or hoodie? Boots or sneakers? Jacket or cardigan? Sweatpants or pajamas?

But Paul is talking about something deeper. He says the most important decision we make each day isn't what we wear on our bodies, but who we wear in our lives. "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ," he says.

- Wear his patience when tempers begin to rise.
- Wear his humility when pride starts whispering in your ear.
- Wear his compassion when someone else's burden crosses your path.
- Wear his courage when doing the right thing becomes uncomfortable.

Long before wearable technology, Paul understood that identity is something people can see. When the world looks at the church, it should be able to recognize what we are wearing, who we claim to model our lives after.

So before we step into each new day - before the first conversation, decision or challenge - the question isn't "what am I wearing today?" but rather, "who am I wearing today?"

You can forget your watch, your ring, even your jacket - but don't forget to put on Christ. Alleluia, Amen.