

Stop Hitting the Snooze Button
Romans 13:8-14
Sunday, September 6, 2020
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When a group from Woodlawn Chapel travelled to Puerto Rico to volunteer for Presbyterian Disaster Assistance last November, we learned three essential facts:

1) Roosters in Puerto Rico get up VERY early. It almost seems as if there is a competition among neighborhoods to see which rooster can be the first to start crowing – which invariably is well before daylight. By the third day of their not so melodious harmonizing, some were threatening to make chicken soup.

2) We also learned that the roosters get up early in order to awaken the bell ringers at the Catholic Church, which was across the street from the Presbyterian church where we were staying. The Catholic bells begin about 4:30 in the morning. The clanging from the bells bounces around the flat concrete roofs and is amplified through all the cement and open windows. The bells in the church are ancient, brought over to Puerto Rico from Spain, a fact which only seems to have increased their volume.

3) We learned that you do not know the full meaning of loving your neighbor until you are clanged out of bed by roosters followed by bells at 4:30 in the morning by bells.

The roosters and the bells were our alarm clocks, the signal that coffee and fresh baked pastries would soon be ready. When morning comes, our alarms rouse us from slumber and invite us to either pull the covers over our heads or to push out into the darkness of a new morning.

I got to thinking about our Puerto Rican alarm clocks the other day when I was reading about the history of alarm clocks in the United States. Now here's a category for your next trivia contest: the first alarm clock manufactured in America was made by a New England Yankee named Levi Hutchins in 1787. Hutchins was an early riser, and so he made his clock with one fixed wake up time for 4:00 a.m. This might have been the flaw in his business model. It would be

about 100 years until a clock maker named Seth Thomas would invent a clock with an alarm the user could actually set.

Sometime around the It was not until the mid-1950s when an enterprising engineer from General Electric came up with the idea of a nine-minute snooze button. Snooze buttons changed the world. For nine minutes every morning we can have the illusion of exercising control over our lives – even if scientists tell us snooze buttons are not so good for our health.

We have a love/hate relationship with snooze buttons. Some people love them so much that they actually set a second alarm every day so that they can enjoy the pleasure of hitting the snooze button a second, third or even fourth time.

In the days when we had four kids to get off to school, hitting the snooze button created untimely delays in the early morning of matching socks, lunches, and backpacks. These days we have Toby, our lab/collie mix. Toby does not require socks or a lunch, but he also does not believe in snooze buttons. Toby wakes up full of love and energy and ready for a walk.

Paul, it seems, may have also been a dog walker. He must certainly have been an early riser: there are references in his letters to waking up and getting moving. “Let us not fall asleep,” he warns the Thessalonians, which is believed to be the oldest letter in the New Testament. “But keep awake.” Likewise, Paul urges the Ephesians to “live as children of the light,” waking up so Christ will shine on you.”

And then here, in Romans 13: “You know what time it is; how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep.”

In other words, don’t even think of reaching for the snooze button.

Paul’s message to the church is that the rooster is crowing, the bells are ringing, and coffee is brewing. It’s time to get moving. I imagine Paul as the impatient apostle who wakes up early, drinks two cups of coffee, reads the paper and sits at the kitchen table drumming his fingers until the church gets up. He is up and ready to roll, fully caffeinated and headed out the door. It is time to get moving.

Levi Hutchens and the roosters of Puerto Rico would agree.

But, as any parent can attest, it is one thing to know that it is time to get up, and it is another to actually get your kids’ feet on the floor. There were mornings when our front hallway seemed like the runway at Lambert, planes lined up, ready for lift off. Paul’s words convey a similar instinct. But his motivation is not

on time performance but rather an awareness of the gospel's urgency. He has no patience for those who lag, or for those who do not understand the importance of the message entrusted to the church.

His expectations were shaped by the conviction of Christ's urgent return. The church, he believed, is called to live with this sort of urgency: laying aside works of darkness, living honorably in the day, taking off our pajamas and clothing ourselves with the garment of Christ's love.

In truth, this is how the church is still called to live—eagerly, expectantly, transformed by the good news of God's love.

Don't hit the snooze button, but instead realize that now is the time that we are called to live in sacred community. We are called to bold acts of love, and partnerships of mutuality. We are called to live as a holy people by honoring the commandments. Listen to this translation from the Common English Bible: "Love does do anything wrong to a neighbor, therefor love is what fulfills the law.

The urgency of our hope in Christ is shown in the way we love our neighbors.

This view permeated the early church. It called Christians to pray energetically and hopefully the words Jesus had prayed: "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done." Love fulfills the expectations of God—it is the debt we owe to God, the promise that we will love others just as God has loved us.

In times of unrest and difficulty, we rely on the promise of God to keep our hopes alive, just as we have experienced these last six months. But God's promise to love us is also an experience that dislodges us from places of comfort. God's promise to love without hesitation is the alarm clock that rings in our ears, calling us to our feet, and inviting us to discover what it means to love our neighbors in this new time.

In the heated moments of the Montgomery, AL bus boycott, an elderly woman once approached Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. She looked at him, perceiving that the pastor and civil rights leader was tired and showing signs of doubt and fear. Mother Pollard, as she was known, confronted King and said to him, "You can't fool me. I know something is wrong. Is it that we ain't doing things to please you? Or is it that the white folks is bothering you?" Before King could reply, Mrs. Pollard said, "I done told you we is with you all the way...but even if we ain't with you, God's gonna take care of you."

It is that promise which profoundly challenges the church in each generation, which calls every day ordinary Christians like you and me to live into the calling to owe nothing to anyone except for the obligation to love each other.

Stop hitting the snooze button, church. And get busy with the hard work of loving. It is hard work, it is risky work. It is work that calls us out of the places where we may feel most comfortable and calls us to leave behind our warm comforters and blankets. Get up! Get dressed!

You know what time it is: it is a time for people to stop saying unacceptable and hurtful things to each other online. It's called "toxic disinhibition."¹ There are some who feel as though the Internet offers a chance to be mean-spirited, rude, or snarky in ways that we might not be in real life.

You know what time it is: it is a time when social distancing makes it harder to welcome one another, but still we are called to love.

You know what time it is: it is a time when the pressure cooker of politics and division is on full steam. How can we use this time to offer signs of love to one another?

Tomorrow morning a few of us will gather on the church parking lot – all socially distanced, of course, and wearing masks – and we will take a few steps to help our friends at the St. Louis Reconciliation Network. We will stand with them as they try to help heal the racial division of this region.

You know what time it is: it is time to remember we are loved, and it is time to offer that love to our neighbor. Amen.

¹ See <https://www.learning-theories.com/online-disinhibition-effect-suler.html#:~:text=Summary%3A%20The%20online%20disinhibition%20effect,in%20interactions%20on%20the%20Internet.>