

March 19, 2023

Ephesians 5:8-14

“Walk As Children of Light”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Imagine a scenario in which you are lost in a forest during a cloudy night where the moon cannot give you its light. You don't have your smart phone to be used as a flashlight. It is so dark that you cannot see your hand in front of your face. There is simply no light to be found. As you are wandering through the dark forest, you have now traveled so far that you have forgotten which direction from which you came.

Suddenly off in the distance appears a man making his way through the forest with his flashlight. Knowing that he may be able to help, you carefully make your way to him. Upon meeting the man with the flashlight he instructs you that he is very familiar with the forest, and that he is able to help you navigate out of the forest back to your house. All that you need to do is follow him as he shines his light for you to see.

The question that I want to ask you is this: will you follow this man who is able to give you light, or will you continue to walk in the dark though you know that the man with the light could lead you home? So it is with our walk with Christ who is the light of the world. What good is it if we have the light of life and yet we chose not to follow him? Do we not understand that by not following Jesus we will lose the light and be lost in darkness? Today, on this Fourth Sunday in Lent, we are bid to **Walk as Children of Light**.

Well, it certainly is a lot better than walking as children of the night. The Egyptians certainly got a full taste of that during the plague of darkness. It says in Exodus 10:21-23,

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt." So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the people of Israel had light where they lived.

Now that's a taste of hell. So dark that you don't rise from your place for three days. I really can't wrap my mind around that. It doesn't really matter. More importantly, I don't want to ever experience that under any circumstance. We should all prefer to **Walk as Children of Light**.

The apostle Paul writes in our epistle lesson: "... at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." I wonder what it was like for the people who were at the foot of the cross particularly in that moment when it says in Mark 10:33-34, "And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" Jesus endures all of our darkness. You name the darkness and Jesus took it. He is forsaken when we should have been forsaken and left frozen in the darkness of sin and death without end. But since he is the light of the world, he is able to absorb into himself all our darkness. And, having done so for you and me, the sun shines again to inform us that there is light to be received from him!

You might recall that I said a few moments ago, “I wonder what it was like at the foot of the cross” when darkness was over the whole land. The truth is that all of us, who are Christian, have suffered in the darkness of the law and have died with Christ in confession of sins. The light of absolution has brought us out of that horrible fright and into the light of the Lord. But I have to say that I am amazed at how, even after knowing what the darkness is like, we still tend to want to live in it to some extent. There is this wickedness in us that desires to have what we think are the best of both worlds - like chicken - a bit of white meat and a bit of dark. But our relationship with the Lord is far different than our relationship with chicken.

Unbelief and belief cannot mix. One cannot have partnership with both righteousness and lawlessness. Love and lovelessness do not make a good couple. Christ and the serpent don't go to parties together. “Or ...” as Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 6:14c, “... what fellowship has light with darkness?” That brings us to the core of our epistle lesson, which are also the words of Paul. But before I quote those words, I would like to make a further observation.

Our transformation from darkness to light, from sinner to saint, was accomplished without any merit, any worthiness, or even any desire on our part. This transformation was created solely by God's free grace. It was a gift. And as we look back on what we have been rescued from, and the price of that gift, and how the love of God paid that price, we should have a different mind - a different attitude about the darkness. And this is what Paul is driving at in Ephesians 5:8-13,

... now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light.

Like the Ephesians, when they were brought to faith, they were enlightened by Christ. Jesus dispelled the darkness of their hearts and minds and souls. He shone into their lives and he showed them a new way of life - a life centered on Him. The verse that the sermon hymn is based on, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you” was probably a portion of a baptism hymn which describes how Christ awakens people with his light and gives them life (LSB 697). We have been changed, not because we decided to, but because Jesus changed us. He is the light of the world—God's one and only Son, our Savior. He came into our darkness and has brought us to love and life.

Paul's message is basically this. You were headed to hell. You had no portion in God. But that isn't true anymore. You have been brought to faith. Light has poured into your soul. And now Christ enables you to walk in the light of him. Until you die or the trumpet sounds, you will always feel the darkness creeping into your life, for it is still in you, but in the gift of the forgiveness sins, you may push it back and keep faith. But with this endeavor comes great suffering, as Peter writes: “... whoever suffers in the flesh is done with sin.” Yes - whoever suffers. And Jesus says in Luke, “... pick up your cross daily and follow me.” Come and die to sin. Dying is by no means easy. It is truly painful to say “no” to yourself.

To **Walk as Children of Light** means that our walk in this life is different than in the days before we knew Jesus. If you go back to live in the dark you will stumble and fall. And that is the issue in this text. We do not walk in the light of life to save ourselves. We walk in the light of life and avoid the darkness so that we do not lose faith. We do not desire to destroy the faith we have in Jesus, and for that reason, we strive to discern what is pleasing to the Lord and take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, for we do not wish to ever lose the peace that passes all understanding. And if we have fallen into the works of darkness, now is the time to repent and look to Christ.

We are no different than the Ephesians. They had to be reminded again and again to walk as children of light, to forsake the world and its influence, to remember their glorious transformation through the atoning sacrifice of Christ. They had to be reminded of it, and we do to, because there is always a battle between darkness and light raging within us. And sometimes, we must sadly confess, there have been moments when the darkness has gotten the better of us. For that we prayerfully confess and once again look to Jesus and avoid grieving his Spirit. And as we find ourselves in this moment filled with the light of love and forgiveness and life we renew our zeal to **Walk as Children of Light**. Let us all then embrace what Paul says: "... when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

‘Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.’”

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott