

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church -- Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Lent 3 – March 27th, 2011

Ephesians 5:8-14

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: “Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Dear Friends in Christ,

Of all the words that Martin Luther wrote, and he wrote many, these words for me are some of the most beautiful: “He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. All this he did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from death and live and rules eternally.”

Many of you recognize those words as the explanation of the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed. In simple words, he summarizes the clear teaching of Scripture in three areas: 1) our desperate need for redemption [we are lost and condemned creatures], 2) our Savior's accomplishment of that redemption [with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death], and 3) the Lord's purpose in redeeming us [that I should be his own and live under him in his kingdom and serve him].

During this season of Lent, the first two points are particularly clear. But the third piece sometimes goes missing: “All this he did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.” Jesus redeemed us for a purpose: not just that we would live with him, but that we would live for him. Jesus redeemed us so that we would have life to the full. That's God's gift to all who trust in Christ as their Savior: full lives. This morning, through our study of this section of St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we want to consider this truth:

Theme: The Children Of Light Live Full Lives

- 1. Joyful Lives**
- 2. Careful Lives**

The Apostle wrote this letter to a congregation near and dear to his heart. During his third missionary journey, he stayed in Ephesus for three years (longer than he was in any other place). He had been the Lord's instrument in bringing many to faith. In other words, he knew them before and he knew them after the Lord's gracious working in their hearts and lives. That's why he could say, **“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.”** He knew the darkness that covered the people in Ephesus. They did not have a clue about the true God and the Savior of the world, the Lord Jesus. Like everyone, they knew from the testimony of the world around them and from conscience that God exists, but they didn't know the God of love revealed only in Scripture. St. Paul also knew what he had found in the city of Ephesus: a large number of people, who acknowledging the existence of a god, bowed down in worship to statues of the goddess Artemis. The people of Ephesus were definitely in spiritual darkness.

Actually, the Apostle makes a stronger statement. He didn't just say that they were in darkness. He said **“You were darkness.”** They weren't just influenced by darkness; they weren't just followers who didn't know any better; they themselves were a bad influence. They lived in a way that was harmful to themselves and harmful to others. By the Lord's grace, and only by his grace, that changed. In chapter two,

he wrote, **“You were dead in your transgressions and sins.”** Not “injured” or “sick” or “weak” or “mostly dead all day,” but dead. Corpses, literally. But the Lord miraculously raised them from the dead by the gift of faith. It was because of that gift of faith worked in their hearts through the proclamation of the Word that St. Paul could say, **“Now you are light in the Lord.”** The before and after comparison was nothing short of amazing. Previously in the dark about the way to life with God, they were now in the light. They knew that righteousness came as a gift of God’s grace through faith in Christ. They were more than “in the light.” They were light in the Lord. God had made them the light of the world. God made them to have a positive influence and effect on the people around them.

How instructive! Before the Apostle ever tells them what to do or how to live, he reminds them of who they are by the Lord’s grace — they are the children of light. How different it was from before! In chapter 2:3, St. Paul tells them that they were “children of wrath.” Now, they are children of light. With what great joy they could face each day and carry out the duties of life! They had been graciously transformed from useless to useful, from harmful to helpful, from bringers of death to bringers of life.

To those who had been so richly blessed, Paul says, at the end of verse 8, **“Live as children of light.”** The word translated “live” has behind it the idea of “walking around” or “wandering around.” In other words, they weren’t simply to be the children of light on the Lord’s Day as they gathered together in worship. This was to be their all-consuming activity. They had a full life of service. They could use every moment of every day to give thanks to the Savior for his goodness to them.

In the parenthetical note of verse 9, the Apostle emphasizes that the children of light will be helpful and useful: **“for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth.”** Goodness shows itself in generosity, in generously addressing the needs of others. Gone from the children of light is obsession with self. Righteousness shows itself in fairness, not trying to take advantage of others, but making sure that their needs are addressed. Truth, or truthfulness, shows itself in dependability, in keeping promises made to others.

By God’s grace, you and I are light in the Lord. Though God could rightly have condemned all descendants of Adam to death, he sent his Son to live and die in place of all. In our place. Instead of avoiding us and the stench of our sin, the Lord drew near in Baptism and washed our sin away. He gave us his Holy Spirit and formed faith in our hearts, all by himself, without any assistance from us. Through that faith he has given us life with him now and forever. One would expect to see joyful lives from the children of light, who were graciously rescued from hell. Joy would so overflow from our hearts that our only concern and question would be, “What would God have me do in this situation to glorify him and be a blessing to others?”

How shocking, then, is our apathy towards the Lord! Often we don’t care to open his Word each day or we don’t care to focus on the Word proclaimed on Sunday morning because our minds are occupied with this afternoon’s activities or the details of the service folder or because “we’ve heard it all already and have it mastered.” We don’t care to carry out our daily duties in love for God and neighbor. We put on our blinders and see any extra duties as more than we can handle and leave it to others to do what we could do. Instead of living as children of light, we live as children of darkness.

How could that be? Isn’t it this — we don’t believe what God says about us in his Word. We don’t believe that we truly are children of wrath by nature and deserving only of punishment. When I fail to see myself as sinful through and through, then I will also fail to see the greatness of my Savior. Then my joy will be less than what God designs for it to be. Or, it could be that I don’t believe what God says about those who have been redeemed — that they are righteous in his sight. When I fail to see myself as righteous, and see myself only as a sinner, then I will not have the joy the Lord designs for me to have.

In the final analysis, my apathy is a sign of my unbelief. It’s a demonstration that I do not believe everything God says about me in his Word. Jesus says about unbelief, **“Whoever does not believe will be condemned.”** That’s why Jesus was condemned at Calvary. Because of your unbelief and mine. He paid the price for our sins, even this sin that we commit over and over again. His love is astounding; his sacrifice amazing — he covers over every one of our sins and gives us righteousness to stand before God.

The holy God sees us, through faith in Jesus, as ones with perfect faith. Through that truth the Spirit fills us with joy and enables us to live as children of light. Do you remember the first time that you got to take the family car by yourself? After a fair amount of begging, pleading, and whining, your parents handed you the key. And, as parents often do, didn't they offer you some advice before letting go of the keys. I don't know what your parents said to you, but I remember what my father said to me. It wasn't, "Enjoy. Have fun with the car." Concerned for my well-being (I assume), concerned for the safety of others who would have the misfortune of being on the road at the same time, concerned for the vehicle he needed to get to work each day, he said, "Be careful." That's what the Lord desires from us: a careful life.

Look at the first part of verse 11: **"Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness."** Literally, it says, "Stop joining together in fellowship with the fruitless deeds of darkness." This is something that was happening that needed to stop immediately. You can imagine how difficult it was for the Christians in Ephesus, who at one time had lived just like the unbelievers all around them, to stay away from the deeds of darkness. They had grown accustomed to the sins around them and considered those deeds just part of normal life. The Christians in Ephesus had to be careful not to join again in activities that were contrary to the will of God.

Notice, too, how St. Paul describes those deeds of darkness: they are **"fruitless."** The deeds of darkness seem enjoyable. They promise happiness and fulfillment. In the end, however, they produce nothing. They are fruitless. The Apostle tells them to do more than stop joining in with the sinful practices. He says, "But rather expose them." It's not enough for the children of light just to avoid the deeds of darkness all around them.

They are also to speak out against those deeds of darkness. Though the world around wants them to remain silent and allow everyone the so-called "freedom" to do whatever they want to do, the children of light refuse to do so. They will speak. To say nothing about the sinful practices of the world around is to offer approval. The children of light need to be careful to give a clear confession. Why the children of light need to censure the deeds of darkness is clear from verse 12: **"For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret."** The point seems to be this: One can assume that if a person is openly disobeying the law of God and publicly engaging in deeds of darkness, then he is also doing even more shameful deeds in secret. Fail to reprove the open sins, thus giving approval, and you are encouraging an increasingly slippery slope in private life. You know the cycle. That which occurs in private soon occurs in public, until it gains a footing and is recognized as the norm.

But there's more to it than that. Our purpose in pointing out sin is not just to curb it. Our purpose in revealing sin is to lead people to repentance — that they not only see their sin as an offense against God, but that they also see their need for a Savior, and are thus prepared to hear the message of forgiveness and life in Christ. If we are not careful, we can become so fixated on outward behavior that we forget the important matter is a person's soul. The important matter is announcing the forgiveness of sins in Christ, not first changing behavior. That's the Apostle's point in verses 13 and 14: **"But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible."**

Paul concludes with these words: **"Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."** The reason to point out someone's sin is to lead him to see his spiritual condition and his need for the Savior. Who's the "sleeper"? It could be that the reproof and correction must be directed to our fellow believers, who are sleep-walking, who are acting as if faith and habitual sin can coexist peacefully, that they can have fellowship both with God and with darkness. Or it may be an unbeliever who foolishly believes that he is right with God on the basis of who he is or what he has done. Or, it could be ourselves.

The Lord's promise is clear. The one who wakes up, that is, the one who comes to repentance, will experience the grace of God in Christ. **"Christ will shine on you."** Christ will assure you of the forgiveness of your sins and your place in the family of God. He will assure you that are righteous in the sight of the Father and an heir of everlasting life by faith in his name.

The child of light lives a full life — a careful life. Careful, first, not to have fellowship with the fruitless deeds of darkness. Knowing that we are the children of God, we don't do just everything and anything. We want to attract people to the Lord Jesus, the Savior of the world. The last thing we want to do

is to compromise our witness by copying what we see in the world around us. So we examine our lives carefully, asking if we are being the people God has called us to be or we have become partners with the world. We're careful to live in a way that glorifies God.

We're careful, secondly, to expose the deeds of darkness. If we do not speak out, people will assume that we approve. We must reprove and condemn sin. Particularly is that true with our fellow believers. We need to care enough to rebuke them. It's the devil that tells us, "It's not your place to do that; it's not your place to tell that person that he is transgressing God's commands." God has given us to each other for our spiritual benefit. We are careful, as we point out sin, that we do so from a loving heart, aimed at their spiritual well being, and a humble heart, recognizing that we could fall into the same sin ourselves because of the weakness of our sinful flesh. The Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10: **"So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you do not fall."** Our confidence is based on the Lord and his promise, not on our own strength to stand.

Brought by God from darkness into light, we have been transformed. We have a new nature that is able and willing to do what God wants us to do. We want to be what God has made us to be: the children of light. This life in Christ, a gift of his grace to us by the working of the Spirit, is a joyful life and a careful life. "All this he did, that I should be his own and live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness. Amen