

Sermon for March 19, 2017 – Lent 3

Ephesians 5:8-14 (Evangelical Heritage Version)

**Theme: It's time to turn on the light.**

- 1) *First in your own heart*
- 2) *Then in the hearts of others.*

*<sup>8</sup>For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light, <sup>9</sup>for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth. <sup>10</sup>Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord, <sup>11</sup>and do not participate in fruitless deeds of darkness. Instead, expose them. <sup>12</sup>For it is shameful even to mention the things that are done by people in secret. <sup>13</sup>But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes things visible. <sup>14</sup>Therefore it is said, "Awake, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."*

Let me share a funny story with you about my parents when they were missionaries in Russia. One day, after returning from a multi-week furlough, they came back to their Russian apartment loaded with luggage. Since the light switch was located half way down a small entryway, they had to enter their apartment in the dark.

As my parents walked in they heard a crunching sound. What was going on? They turned on the light to find out. To their horror and disgust they found themselves walking on a floor cover with dead cockroaches! Someone did them the favor of fumigating their apartment while they were gone, but failed to clean up the mess before their arrival.

What's the moral of the story? Don't assume to know what's in the darkness. Turn on the light so you can see. Who knows: maybe the light will reveal a disgusting problem that needs to be solved. This is not only true when entering your house after a vacation; it is also true regarding your heart. The human heart is a very dark place – full of things far more disgusting and dangerous than cockroaches. But God has given us a light so that we don't stumble in the darkness. What is this light? It's God's Word – his holy law and Gospel – that both exposes our sin and leads us to our Savior.

Let us consider this truth, under the theme: **Turn on the light.** *1) First, in your own heart and 2) then in the hearts of others.*

**Part One:** Turn on the Light in your own heart . . .

Our sermon text is taken from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, which begins by encouraging you to consider God's amazing grace. He chose you from before creation to be saved through Jesus' perfect life, innocent death and glorious resurrection. Not only that, but, through the preaching of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit created faith in your heart to receive this forgiveness, which you could have never earned or deserved on your own. It is a free gift of God; as St. Paul says *because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were*

*dead in transgressions . . . For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* <sup>i</sup>

How, then, should you respond to God’s wonderful grace? St. Paul tells us (shortly before our text): *Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children* <sup>2</sup> *and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*<sup>ii</sup> In other words, because Christ loved you so much that he sacrificed himself in order to save you, respond to his love by loving both God and your fellow man as the LORD has loved you!

“<sup>8</sup>*For,*” St Paul writes, “*you were once darkness.*” That is to say: before the Holy Spirit created faith in your heart, you were ignorant of God – neither knowing nor wanting to know his will. “*But now you are light in the Lord.*” That is to say: you are declared forgiven, righteous and holy in God’s sight through faith in Christ. Why? Because *God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*<sup>iii</sup>

Jesus once said: “*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*”<sup>iv</sup> Through the preaching of his Law, Christ illuminates your heart so that you can see all the disgusting, rotten sinfulness lurking inside your nature. He then uses the light of his Gospel to reveal to you all that the LORD has done to atone for your sins. Christ has paid for them in full on the cross. He offers you this forgiveness as a free gift, which you receive through repentance and faith.

Yes, Jesus truly is the light of the world: a cleansing light that illuminates believers hearts to such a degree that they become light themselves. This is why the apostle urges: *Walk as children of light, <sup>9</sup>for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth. <sup>10</sup>Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord <sup>11</sup>and do not participate in fruitless deeds of darkness.*

Through baptism, God has adopted you as his dearly loved child. Since you are God’s child through faith, live like one – pursuing things that are truly good, noble and righteous. And where do you learn that? In the Bible! God’s Word tells you what it is good, righteous and true. This is yet another reason to study God’s Word both at home and in Church: so that, remaining in the light of the Lord’s forgiveness, you might be a light in the world.

Have you ever had someone wake you up by flooding a dark bed room with light? It is painful and annoying, but it does wake you up! In a similar way, examining your heart in the light of God’s Word can be painful – as God’s law reveals every dirty secret and pet sin. But understand that this pain has a purpose: it is meant to walk you up to Christ for forgiveness and salvation. Yes, the more you realize your sins, the more precious Christ’s forgiveness becomes. The light of the Gospel forgives your sin – purifying your heart from every evil. And, in the peace of this forgiveness, you will want to thank God by sharing his salvation with others.

Part Two: . . . then in the hearts of others.

I want to go back to the first verse of our sermon text. Paul wrote: *you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.* Notice that God doesn't say that you were once in darkness, but that you were darkness. This is significant. Why? Let me use an illustration to explain. When a person has cancer, it means that certain cells have mutated in their body. The cells don't just have cancer, they are cancerous - affecting other cells, causing them to mutate as well. This is how cancer spreads.

Paul says that you were once darkness. Just as a cancerous cell spreads its cancer, so also your sinful actions and unbelief not only affected yourself, but lead others around you into sin.

*"But now you are light in the Lord."* Again, you are not just in the light; you are light. For just as the moon basks in the light of the sun to such a degree that it is able to illuminate the dark side of the earth, so also you, as you remain in Christ's light, become a light yourself – reflecting God's truth upon this earth. <sup>14</sup> *"You are the light of the world."* Jesus once said, *"A city on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."*

God wants you to shine his light of his law and Gospel into the hearts of others that they might recognize their sins, repent and be saved. "What?" you might be thinking, "I'm no pastor or missionary. I wouldn't know what to say? How could I even begin to do this?" St. Paul tells you how: it's as simple as avoiding sin yourself.

<sup>10</sup>*Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord, <sup>11</sup>and do not participate in fruitless deeds of darkness. Instead, expose them. <sup>12</sup>For it is shameful even to mention the things that are done by people in secret. <sup>13</sup>But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes things visible.*

Let me give you two examples of what the apostle Paul means:

Let's say your coworker has a habit of cursing or talking filthy. By simply not partaking in such talk, you show them that there is something offensive and wrong with what they are saying.

Let's say some friends invite you to an inappropriate movie. By simply declining the invitation and honestly telling your friends why you don't want to go, you have just shined a light on their own motives and exposed their own sinfulness.

Yes, by simply not participating with others in their drunkenness, gossip, foul speech and other sins – you expose the darkness. Trust me: saying "no" to a friend who wants you to join with him in a sin will make his conscience burn. He might even get mad at you, call you all sorts of names or end his friendship with you. Why? Because no one likes seeing their sin exposed – as Jesus once said: *Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.*<sup>vi</sup>

But then why should you do it? Why should you expose the sins of others? You do it out of love for their souls. You see, just as a person will not take medicine unless he is convinced that he is sick, so also a person will not run to Christ in repentance and faith unless he is convinced of his sins. And it's for this very purpose that God calls you to "exposes the deeds of darkness": that people might see and understand the sin that lurks in their hearts, and start looking for help.

And once people start looking for help, they will begin to ask you about the hope you have. Then you have the blessed privilege of sharing the Light of Christ's love with them: telling them about how Jesus lived, died and rose again to forgive their sins and rescue them from the darkness, just as he rescued you. Your words and actions will cry out: *"Awake, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."* And what a blessed privilege it is to do this, as St. James says: *remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.*<sup>vii</sup>

Brothers and sisters in Christ, it's time to turn on the light, first shining it in our own hearts, and then shining it on the hearts of others. Let us no longer live as though we are darkness, for Christ has bought us back from darkness into light. We are God's children, so let us act this way; and, just as the moon always gazes at the sun, reflecting its warm rays upon a night filled earth, so may we also always be filled with God's saving light, and share it with others. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Ephesians 2:4-5,8-10 NIV84

<sup>ii</sup> Ephesians 5:1-2 NIV84

<sup>iii</sup> John 3:16 NIV84

<sup>iv</sup> John 8:12 NIV84

<sup>v</sup> Matthew 5:14-16 (NIV84)

<sup>vi</sup> John 3:20 NIV84

<sup>vii</sup> James 5:20 NIV84