

Light in the World
Philippians 1:1-18
Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri
October 1, 2017 – Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost



In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. In Saint Paul's letter to the Philippians, today's Epistle lesson, Paul appeals to us as Christians to live as who God has made us to be: "children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the Word of life." Did you catch what he said? He said that "You Shine as Lights in the World." Does that observation surprise you? It did me. So today we're going to find out how that happens, and why.

Well, before you can shine, you first have to be a child of God. That didn't happen by your birth according to the flesh. No, you had to be born again. Flesh gives birth to flesh, and the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You had to be born again, from above, born of water and the Spirit. In other words, Baptism. You needed a new nature. Your old self was born in sin, the original, inherited sin that comes down to us all from our first father, Adam. That old, Adamic sinful nature was inherited by all of us at birth. What that means is that we will always live our lives in rebellion against God so long as we live on this side of heaven. It means we want to be our own god. It means not loving God or our neighbor, but turning in on ourselves. That's who we are by birth. And that birth will get you nowhere – nowhere except the grave and hell.

But God in His grace has given you the new birth in Holy Baptism, "the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" which works faith in your heart through the Word of God, so that now you trust in Jesus Christ, your Savior. Christ washed away your sins by His blood shed on the cross, making you blameless, innocent and without blemish in God's sight. In Baptism, God put His name on you and claimed you as His own dear child. Now you can hear the words of this text and apply them to yourself. You *are* the children of God spoken of here, and Paul is speaking to you today, as well as to the Philippians. You, dear Christian, you are "a child of God without blemish in the midst of this crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as a light in the world, holding fast to the Word of life."

But even so you still live in a world that is decidedly not a friendly but a hostile environment for the children of God. It was so back then, and so it is today. Need

proof? Just turn on the television, read the newspaper or surf the Internet. There the crookedness and twistedness of this generation is on full display. Half-clad pop tarts twerking. Islamic terrorists chopping people's heads off. Many of the leaders of our nation applauding and encouraging sodomite "marriages" while real Biblical marriage is disdained in favor of hooking up and shacking up. Materialism, greed and the love of pleasure have become the top pursuit for most of our society. The world has gone completely mad. Evil is called good, and good is called evil. That's the world we live in. It is truly a crooked and twisted generation. Hardly a haven for Christian faith or life.

But we are in the world, not of the world. We have a different set of values. We have a different God, the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And this God gives us our meaning, our identity, our purpose, and our security in this world gone mad. We march to the beat of a different drummer. And as we march, God has a purpose for us in this sin-darkened world. We are here for a reason. I suppose God could have just beamed you up and whisked you away as soon as you were Baptized. But instead God has left you here for a reason. There is a purpose for each of us being the Church in the world.

And here it is. "You {are to} shine as lights in the world." This is a world that needs the light we have, and God will use you to shine forth with this light. The world is lost in darkness, groping around, not knowing God, and with most not even knowing they're lost and heading to hell. But instead of bemoaning the fact that we have to live here, God has a positive purpose for us as His Church in the midst of this darkness. We shine as lights. And today let me suggest two ways in which we do that. We shine as lights in the world because we have the mind of Christ. And we shine as lights in the world because we have the message of Christ.

First, we shine as lights in the world because we have the mind of Christ. This is our new nature that I'm talking about. The Spirit forms in us the mind of Christ, so we begin to think and act as our Savior did. This mind of Christ is a mind set on service, enlivened with love, and clothed with humility. And God has prepared and equipped us so that we can respond in this way. Paul writes at the start of Philippians 2: "So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love,

any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” And then later he adds, “for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”

This means you are to think and act in a Christ-like way. But you might say: “I can’t do that!” And you would be right. According to your old nature you can’t. And even as a Christian, your old Adam will still be tugging at you, pulling you back to the ways of the world, the ways of the sinful flesh. But remember, you are Baptized. You have a new nature, created in Christ Jesus, formed and led by the Spirit. So these words are for you. Listen again to what Paul says: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” This mind is yours in Christ. You have it. It is God’s gift to you. And this mind of Christ is a humble, loving, servant mind, bent on doing the will of God and loving and serving others. That’s the mind you have now, in Christ. And this makes a difference in how you live.

So this is the first way in which we shine as lights in the world: We live differently. We love and serve one another. We love and serve our neighbor. This stands out. This shines out. People notice the way we live as Christians, as Church. It was said of the Early Church, that the world would look at them and say, “See how they love one another!” The light of Christ shines through to others in the way we live, and this brings honor and glory to God. Didn’t Jesus say this very thing? He told his disciples: “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

The Church is called to be an oasis of love in a dry and thirsty land. Our congregation is called to be a family of brothers and sisters, serving both one another and our neighbor in love. Yes, we have the mind of Christ being formed in us, and it shapes the way we live. And this, in turn, will draw people to our message. And that is the second way in which we shine as lights in the world: We have the message of Christ. Paul gives a great summary of this message smack dab in the middle of our today’s text, Philippians 2:5-11, one of the great passages in all of the New Testament: “Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count

equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

What a wonderful confession of the person and the work of Christ! He, the Second Person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God, willingly took on human flesh and became our Brother. He came down from heaven “for us men and for our salvation.” He took the form of a servant, just as Jesus said about himself: “The Son of Man came not to be served and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Yes, Jesus is our Redeemer, the One who sets us free from our bondage to sin and death. He did this humbly by carrying out the will of the Father to the point of death, so great was His love for God and for us. And His is not just any death, but death on a cross, the most brutal, shameful death there could be. He, the Innocent One, bore the sin of the guilty, namely, you and me – indeed, the sins of the whole world. With His saving mission accomplished on the cross – “It is finished!” – God the Father then raised up His Son, exalting Him to the highest place, so that now the name of Jesus is the one name under heaven by which men are saved. It is the name we Christians praise and glorify. It is the name of Jesus, the Savior of the world, which we spread abroad as we shine as lights in the world.

“You shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life,” says Saint Paul. You hold fast to the Word of life, for you know that this is the Word of life for us and for all. There is light at the end of the tunnel, and it is not an oncoming train. No, it is our soon-to-becoming King, Jesus Christ, who will come and take us home to be with him forever. Having this sure hope, you hold fast the Word of life. And at the same time you hold forth the Word of life, for this is a Word not only for each of us but for the life of the world. And how do you do that? you do that quite simply by having the mind of Christ and the message of Christ. We shine as lights in the world because we have the mind of Christ, loving and serving one another, and the world will notice that. And we shine as lights in the world because we have the message of Christ, preaching and teaching, sharing and spreading the only saving gospel in our community and all around the world. May it always be so for Jesus’ names’ sake. Amen.