

April 3, 2011
Sermon for the Fourth Sunday in Lent
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Ephesians 5:8-14

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Ephesians 5:8-14 (ESV)

⁸ for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³ But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴ for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

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¹ *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.* Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

The man in our Gospel lesson this morning (John 9:1-41) was born blind. He has known only darkness. He has never seen light. Like any other affliction, it's part of sin's curse on the world. There were no disabilities acts in first-century Judea, so there's very little that the man can do.

He's helpless. Insult to injury, he's used as exhibit A in a bad argument. Even the disciples fall for it: "*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*" In other words, what has he done to deserve this? What makes him worse than most, that he would suffer this affliction? Or maybe it was his parents—what makes them especially evil that their son could not see?

Jesus tells them it's the wrong question, built on wrong assumptions. Neither the man nor his parents are particularly sinful, over and above the rest; and, in fact, Jesus will use the man's blindness to demonstrate His mercy and work—the merciful work of God.

He spits to make mud, puts it on the man's eyes, and sends him off to the pool of Siloam. When the man washes off his face, he can see. For the first time in his life, he is no longer in darkness. Now he walks in light. Jesus has set him free from blindness, from darkness, and here is the question I pose to you:

for what has Jesus set him free?

Part of the answer seems obvious: Jesus hasn't set him free for all sorts of sinful living.

He hasn't healed the man so that he can start an international crime syndicate or spend his nights carousing at the local gentleman's clubs. He hasn't given the man sight so that he can see his way into drunkenness, immorality, theft, murder or any other sin. Jesus hasn't just given light to his eyes, but to his soul. In setting him free from blindness, He's also set him free from sin—not to sin. That part seems obvious enough.

Maybe less obvious, Jesus hasn't restored his sight so he can be a Pharisee either, one that preaches and pounds the law into others. While the man is set free to live a life in keeping with the commandments, he is never to glory in his works or think that they make him righteous. This is what has the Pharisees buzzing like angry hornets. They despise Jesus because He keeps teaching that people are saved by His grace and mercy, not by their obedience. They summon the once-blind man to interrogate him, and his answers only infuriate them more. In summary, he says, "I didn't do anything to earn the healing. He didn't make me promise to do anything in the future. He simply came and healed me. And since a sinner can't do something like that, He must be from God."

So what happens to the man born blind? We don't know. Maybe he goes on to do heroic things in the eyes of man. Maybe he gets married, has a couple of kids and lives out his days in a small town. What we do know is this: once he walked in darkness of body and soul. Now, because of Jesus, he walks in light. *"Walk as children of light." That's how our epistle begins. "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."*

See, you were born blind—not in body perhaps, but in soul. You were born apart from the Light of the world—apart from Jesus and His grace for you. This blindness is unbelief. It is a lack of faith in Jesus. It is being unforgiven. We must define this carefully, because by nature we'll define it incorrectly. The temptation is to define this darkness, this blindness, as what happens to those who ignore consequences and engage in sin.

Think of those who sacrifice their families, blind to the pain they cause, to pursue a lustful sin or the next promotion regardless of the time away from home it takes. Think of those who return to an addiction again and again; they ought to know better, but they still return to their misery. Is this darkness? Sure. But it is not the darkness to which Paul refers. Even many non-Christians would label such people as blind, as in the dark.

But here is the danger: if we define darkness as doing the wrong and harmful thing, then we will define light as doing the right and beneficial thing. If the one who abandons his family lives in darkness, then the one who stays with his family lives in light. If the one who falls prey to drunkenness is blind, then the one with self-control can see, right?

Wrong. Again, this is not the darkness to which our epistle refers. The darkness is living unforgiven—apart from Jesus, the Light of the world.

See, it's true that unrepentant adulterers stand condemned before God for their sin; but it's also true that unbelieving virgins do, too. Impenitent drunkards face God's wrath; so do those who never touched a drop of liquor, but never saw the need for Jesus.

On the other hand, the repentant adulterer or drunkard is forgiven. Jesus says so Himself. In speaking to the well-behaved Pharisees, He says, *“Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him”* (Matthew 21:31-32).

This doesn't make sense to the unbelieving world. Popular opinion says that Christianity is all about morality, about keeping commandments. If you quote Jesus' words to the Pharisees, it won't make sense to those who don't believe. They're in darkness. So walk as children of light. Walk as those for whom Christ has died. By His grace in the light that He gives, discern what is pleasing to the Lord. And what is most pleasing to the Lord?

Above all, the Lord is pleased to forgive you. He delights to give you His grace in His Word and His Supper. Jesus didn't die on the cross to inspire you to behave better. He died on the cross to take away your sins. If you live a life that attempts to follow God's commands, but remain unforgiven, you're lost. You're not pleasing to God.

God is pleased with penitence, with broken and contrite hearts. God delights to forgive you. Therefore, to walk as a child of light means most of all to live as a penitent Christian. It means to confess your sins, receive Christ's forgiveness. It means that you remain the humble blind man of the Gospel lesson, always rejoicing that it is Jesus who has given you sight.

That is what it means to walk in the light. And as you walk in light, you will bear fruit of light. Jesus has set you free from sin, not to sin. You know that, as one forgiven, you're set free to live as God would have you live. Christ is the Vine and you are the branch: because He has joined you to Him, you can now bear good fruit. By His grace, you can resist temptation and do what is good and right and true.

But Old Adam still lurks, and Paul issues this warning: *"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."* As long as you are in this world, there are still dark recesses in your heart, dark corners in your mind. There are sins in which you indulge in secret, either behind the doors of your home or the curtains of your thoughts. There are sins you still battle and sometimes surrender—which you would not want your spouse to know about, or your kids, or your parents, or your pastors. If they were brought out into light and you were exposed, you'd be mortified, so shamed. Yet, they remain. They remain either because you feel helpless against them, or because you think you can't live without them, or because you like them. And you've managed to compartmentalize your life into parts and persuaded yourself that you can hold onto that work of darkness and still walk in the light. It's okay.

You can live with it because nobody knows. But beware. It's not okay. Sin is working to kill you, and a favorite trick of the devil is to get you hold onto some sins and believe you're still totally forgiven. But your sin is not a secret: God already knows. An unrepented sin is an unforgiven sin.

In that light, the secret sin is not so harmless, is it?

Do you feel helpless against the sins with which you struggle? You're right—you are. But Jesus is not. Certainly, to walk as a child of light is not to say, "I can keep this sin;" but neither is it to say, "I can beat this on my own, and thus I will show God I am worthy of His love." You cannot conquer sin: if you could, Jesus would not have had to die for you. You are helpless—He is not. Confess that sin—and confess your helplessness. You can be sure that the Lord has died for that sin, and He promises to be your strength and your shield. You are a child of light. Walk as one: you are forgiven.

This is not a one-time episode. This is how life will always be in a sinful world. So the proclamation to the Ephesians is for you too: "*Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.*" You were born dead in sin, blind in sin. You were born in darkness. But Christ, the Light of the world, has brought His light to you. He has died on the cross to give you salvation. He delivers His grace to you in His Word and His Sacraments. By His grace and faith and work, you are a child of light. By His grace and faith and work, you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In Jesus name,

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus!

Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria