

Ephesians 5:8-14

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

Walk as Children of Light

I.

I like almost everything about winter. The only part that might sound shocking to those who have known me for awhile is the word “almost.” I like the cold. I like the snow. I like driving in snow; blowing the snow, skiing and snow-shoeing in the snow.

There is, however, one thing I’m not so fond of about winter: darkness. There are not enough hours of daylight in those dark winter months. Around here the lack of daylight gets compounded by the number of cloudy days. I saw the statistic in one of the weather reports this winter—Grand Rapids is one of the top 5 cloudiest cities in the US. When it’s cloudy for days on end the darkness of night seems even longer and more dismal.

For some people, seasonal affective disorder makes winter even more difficult. The lack of daylight affects their mood and their ability to work and to function.

The Bible often uses the concept of being blind or in the dark to refer to unbelief. Isaiah used both blind and in the dark in our First Reading: “I will lead the blind on a way they do not know. Along paths they do not know I will direct them. Ahead of them I will turn darkness into light and rough places into level ground” (Isaiah 42:16, EHV).

In the Gospel (John 9), Jesus healed a man who had been born blind. That man could not physically see Jesus, but once Jesus showed him that he was the long-promised Messiah, the man immediately believed in him. The Pharisees could see Jesus, but they were spiritually blind, and did not believe.

Paul described unbelievers in the previous chapter of his Letter to the Ephesians, saying that they are: “Darkened in their understanding” (Ephesians 4:18, EHV). He went on to say that such darkened understanding means that: “They have no sense of shame” (Ephesians 4:19, EHV). Just before today’s Second Reading Paul says: “The wrath of God is coming on the sons of disobedience. ⁷So do not share in what they do” (Ephesians 5:6-7, EHV).

II.

But then, as Paul jumps in to today’s Second Reading, he takes things a step further. He says: “You were once darkness” (Ephesians 5:8, EHV).

After previously describing unbelievers as being darkened in understanding and having no sense of shame, he lumps us right in with them. Not only were you and I *in* the dark, we *were* darkness personified.

Do Paul’s words seem a bit offensive? Being *in* the dark seems like something out of your control. When you are *in* the dark, you grope around, desperately trying to find your way. The first thing on your mind is finding a light switch. Even a flashlight would help at least a little bit. Being darkness itself is another matter. *Being* the darkness means that you and I are culpable. It means that somehow we are at fault for being darkness.

That's absolutely the case, isn't it? We are culpable. We are at fault. Our sins separate us from God. Our sins cause the darkness. Our sins *are* darkness. In fact, that brings up another way the Bible often describes unbelief: being dead in sins. It's a very striking picture. A dead person can do not one thing for him- or her-self. When you're dead—that's it. Things are hopeless. It's all over. Being darkness personified means that things are hopeless.

III.

"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord" (Ephesians 5:8, EHV). A total transformation has taken place.

"Praise the One who breaks the darkness," we sang earlier in our service (CW 517). Jesus broke the darkness for us by becoming darkness—by becoming sin—and taking that darkness of sin to the cross. All the sins that blinded you, that made you a dead person walking, have been paid for in full by Jesus. He broke your darkness and gave you light—the light of faith in him as your Savior.

What Paul says is very important. You are not *in* the light, you *are* light—light in the Lord. There has been a total transformation of who you are.

IV.

The total transformation of who you *are* leads to a total transformation of what you *do*. "Walk as children of light, for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth" (Ephesians 5:8-9, EHV).

Being light means doing something, not just sitting around passively. You are light—you shine. But shine as you do something. Shine as you walk the walk of life. Now that you have been transformed by Jesus, the fruit of the light defines you—goodness, righteousness and truth.

"Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:10, EHV). There are so many who believe a person has to participate in salvation—that a person has to *do* something to get right with God or get closer to God. Paul indicates that is not the case. You have already been transformed by Jesus. You *are* light. You have been *made* right with God. Now you strive to walk as children of the light.

In catechism classes you were taught that there are three uses of the law. The first, and most important, is a mirror. God's law shows you that you are a sinner in need of Jesus. You have learned that. You recognize Jesus as the One who saved you from your sins.

The second use of the law is to keep gross outbreaks of sin in check. Everyone has a conscience that tells them certain things are just wrong. God's written law reinforces the conscience, since it is dulled by repeating the same sins time after time.

The third use of the law is only for the Christian, for the one who is a child of the light. The third use of the law is as a guide. God's law shows the believer what God shows us is good and right in our lives. The mirror of God's law already showed us our flaws and faults; it already urged us to turn to Jesus for forgiveness. Now, as believers, we want to live for the Savior God who has redeemed us from the curse of the law. We seek to learn what is pleasing to the Lord, and then to do it.

Part of learning and doing what is pleasing to the Lord means that we "Do not participate in fruitless deeds of darkness. Instead, expose them" (Ephesians 5:11, EHV). Exposing deeds of darkness has a purpose. We want others to be light, just as we are light. There is a hazard, though. Satan always tries to tempt us with compromise. He wants us to think that maybe just a little bit of participation wouldn't hurt all that much, especially when the goal is to bring someone else to the light. We need to avoid being pulled in to the

fruitless deeds of darkness.

“For it is shameful even to mention the things that are done by people in secret” (Ephesians 5:12, EHV). As you expose the fruitless deeds of darkness, remember your reason. You don’t want to point out how bad people are and expose them for everyone to see.

“But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes things visible” (Ephesians 5:13, EHV). Your reason for exposing deeds of darkness is the desire to rescue someone trapped in darkness.

“Therefore it is said, ‘Awake, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you’” (Ephesians 5:14, EHV). Paul concludes this section with what seems to be an early Christian hymn. The gospel call of God’s grace tells the one sleeping in the death of unbelief to wake up and rise. Hearing the gospel call, Christ shines on you.

The Lenten season has been progressing. Did you know that the word “Lent” comes from an old English word that means “lengthen”? The hours of daylight lengthen as we get closer and closer to spring. I like that. There are many things to be enjoyed that come with the lengthening of daylight hours.

One of those things is Easter. As the days lengthen during the Lenten season, we get closer and closer to Easter. As we get closer, we who are children of light look forward to celebrating the light of the Son of God rising from the dead. Even while we wait for that celebration, we know. We know we are children of light because he is the Light of the world. Walk as children of light. Amen.