

Living in the Light

I've always been more of a morning person than a night owl. I like to get up early. It's a great time to get a workout in, or catch up on some reading. But, there really is one moment that makes mornings so spectacular, what makes it worth getting up: the sunrise. There's a sharp contrast between the night and the day. The dark, and the light. In the dark, it's dreary, gloomy, and cold. The world seems all but stagnant. But then, the sun rises. The light comes in and transforms the whole earth. There is warmth, life and birds begin to sing their daily tunes. This cycle happens every single day. There's beauty to it, a repetition. And within an hour, the world of darkness seems totally different from the world of light. This is what it's like when someone becomes a Christian.

Paul, in our reading for today is playing with this image of light and dark. In our *in Christ* sermon series, we've learned about God's incredible grace and forgiveness for his creation, which He's lavished on all of us. But, that was not always the case. He tells the Ephesian church that at one time, they were all living in darkness. They were all living in unbelief, and this is true. They lived separate from the light, separate from God. For all of us, before we were Christians, we also lived separate from God, even if it was just as children. We lived in darkness, in this dreary, gloomy, cold world. Our lives were turned inward, and we gave little care for anything but ourselves.

But then comes the sunrise. The story of Jesus came into our hearts, has warmed us, and given us a new life, a new standing. This light does not stop, flicker, or fade away. God's won! This is what the first three chapters of Ephesians are all about. How he's done some amazing things for us. But, there's more to the story. There's more

to this letter. We're no longer in chapters one through three anymore, we're in chapters 4 through 5. And it claims this: The standards of the light, which are God's expectations for his people, are high. Very high. If we're all in the light, there's no darkness anymore. If all the darkness is gone, nothing bad can happen, right?

But, sadly this isn't the case. The darkness seems to cling on. Sin is still around. I think we all can see that. Just take a look at the world around us. The darkness, the shadows, seem to keep creeping in. But it's not just in the world around us. Sin isn't all on the outside. We all have our own personal shadows we deal with day by day. The early Christian church in Ephesus was struggling with their shadows too. They were living like they were before they were Christians. Paul calls out a few of these shadows, and he says something that might make our Lutheran ears spin. Verse 5 says, "you may be sure of this, anyone who is sexually immoral or impure or who is covetous, has no inheritance with the kingdom of God." No lusting, and no coveting. These are prime examples of God's standards, his ethics, and they are hard to attain. The standards of the light are high, and the shadows are strong. They are shadows that we all grapple with still today. We are called to never have a thought of lust. Never a passing glance, a sinful desire towards your neighbor. And coveting. Ever wanted something that God hasn't given to you? Maybe you're passed up on a job position. Maybe you want things that someone else has. Ever played that comparison game? I sure have. Left unchecked, these shadows seem creep more and more into our lives in the light. On their own, these sins will keep us from the coming kingdom of God.

So, what do we do with these shadows? What can we do with these persisting sins? Well, we have 3 options. The first option is to revel in the dark. We take pleasure

in our sin, and we let everyone know about it. The reveler lives in the shadows, and openly prefers them to the light. A church of revelers would likely not follow all of God's Word. It looks like a buffet line. They'd pick and choose their favorite parts to follow, and then ignore the rest. These revelers will likely not stay as Christians for long. Instead, they make themselves into God. They decide what is good and bad for them. They in the end are the ones deciding what's darkness and light. What's good and evil.

The second option is subtler, but just as dangerous as the first. We deny the darkness is there. The denier knows what he or she is doing is wrong, but does it secretly. They'll just sweep the shadows under the rug. No one will ever notice. But the shadows still persist. The denier claims to believe in Jesus, but has become numb to the guilt. A church of deniers looks like a museum. They put on display all the great things they do, but they are afraid to acknowledge the rot underneath. Deniers have the shadows, these hidden sins, slowly eat away at their faith until the darkness takes over. Left alone, their darkness eventually overcomes them.

Thankfully, there is a third option, and it is the option we all did already this morning:¹ Expose the darkness. The confessor, when they see the shadows, is reminded of one thing: they need the light. The confessor knows his or her state before God, and it is that they are unworthy. They know their sin, and know that they need a Savior. We do this in every worship service: we confess our sins to God our Father. We confess that we all love to give way to the shadows. We admit our failures, our faults, our broken promises, our bad desires. And something truly miraculous happens, God

¹ For Sat. "...will do later this evening:"

forgives us. The gospel shines into our hearts. There are no strings attached to this promise. It is a free gift; grace lavished on all of us. He forgives us who were dead in our darkness. Our shadows vanish in the light.

For what is darkness but just an absence of light? Darkness cannot exist where the light is. In the same way, our sin cannot exist where Christ is. John 1 says “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness could not overcome it.” That light is Christ, the light of the world. Jesus, the very true son of God came into this world to save each and every one of you. He’s paid for your sin with his death on the cross, and overcame death itself with his resurrection. In Christ, we are now in the light. That light shines bright in your heart when you hear the words of absolution: “God forgives all your sins.” That forgiveness is just as strong and just as sure as when you first became a Christian. In fact, when God looks at us, he no longer sees our sins, our shadows, our shame. God only sees the light. Even at your darkest hours, when you can’t seem to escape the shadows, the light still wins. New shadows come up, the light still wins. Old shadows return, the light still wins. And when you fear the shadows, come back and hear of God’s forgiveness again. This is a cycle that we all live, a repetition, but we know how the story ends: The light always overcomes the darkness.

As the light makes the shadows disappear, we see the world in a different way. In the light of Christ, we see the right way to live in the world. More than that, in the light of Christ, we see the world as it’s meant to be. And it’s good. Very good. Verse 28 says that thieves turn into honest and generous workers. Verse 4 says that foolish talk turns into thanksgiving. Think of how much he can do with you in your daily lives. Think of the people you meet, the corner of His creation you touch. You all carry the light in Christ.

You live in the light. In Christ, you are the light. Go shine on other people's shadows.

Help them to know of God's love for his world. In Christ, the world is full of warmth, light, and all creation sings together to God our Father. It's more striking than any sunrise.