

Third Sunday in Lent

March 27, 2011

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Ephesians 5:8-14

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." (NIV)

"Be who you are." When and why might someone give us this advice to be who we are? I suppose a parent who has children concerned about making friends in a new town or school might encourage them by saying: "Be who you are." They say this to comfort their child explaining "just be yourself and other kids will like you." I suppose these words might also be used to encourage people in a dangerous line of work such as a firefighter or an army soldier. The fire chief or general might urge men and women to put all their hard work and training into action. Leaders might say something like: "You are New York City firefighters or you are the Marines of the United States of America." "Be who you are." In other words, courageously do what you know how to do.

This morning we see a third example of when and why these words might be spoken. We are comforted and encouraged with similar advice from God's Word. Paul reminds the Christians in Ephesus, and us, what we once were and what we are now. We are now children of light - God's children. God provides His children with all we need and more for life on earth and for life one day in heaven. God equips His children with gifts and motivates them with His love. The Lord in every way has made us who we are by His grace. Now Paul gives us some wonderful advice to live by: **Be who you are in Christ.**

Before we can be who we are, it is helpful for us to first know what we were. So Paul uses a metaphor to bring out the stark contrast. What could be more opposite than dark and light? It isn't hard to figure out the bad side, the side we do not want to be on - the people we don't want to be. Darkness is something that scares many children and some adults - especially complete darkness. And consider what we mean when we say a person is "in the dark." We use the expression "in the dark" to say that person has no clue what is going on, that person doesn't understand, that person is left out. Think of what we mean when we talk about someone having a dark side to them. That's not a good thing, is it? We see evil in that person.

Paul reveals that was once us: "**for you were once darkness.**" Paul is talking about what we, you and I, were without Christ. For some of us we may have been this way longer than others, but it is not a good way to live even for a while. To be in the dark spiritually, as Paul explains in this letter, is to be by nature objects of God's wrath, to be dead in our transgressions and sins, to be completely without understanding of true joy, peace, or any other spiritual blessing. Not only were we once in the dark, but we

were dark people - every inclination of our hearts is evil from birth. We were controlled by a sinful nature that is hostile to God. We were God's enemies on a path to an eternity in outer darkness where all God's enemies will be cast forever. Not only were we in the dark and dark people but Paul says we were darkness. We were bad influences to all those around us.

Think about it for just a moment. Without God why would we be any different? What goals would we have? What purpose would our lives serve? The only goal would be to please ourselves. The only purpose for life would be to gratify the sinful nature with all its evil desires. Sexual immorality, debauchery, greed, and impurity are just a few examples of what Paul calls "**fruitless deeds of darkness.**" Without God why not, why not live by the motto: "*If it feels good go for it...eat, drink and be merry...just do it...get all you can for yourself while you can...anything goes.*" Yes, "**it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.**" Are our lives ever filled with such fruitless deeds of darkness? Do we join in with those still in the dark? Do our words and actions reveal such self centered selfishness?

Then we need hear again Paul's strong encouragement for our new life in Christ. For that is not who we are any more. "**For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.**" When you have been stumbling around in darkness, light is a wonderful thing. Imagine being blind your whole life and having your eyes opened to see for the first time. What joy!

In Lent, we focus on the great lengths our God went to pull us out of the darkness of our sin and into His wonderful light. God loved us so much that He sent His one and only Son into the darkness. Jesus was born into this dark world of sin and He stuck out in this world like a light shining in a dark place. How could the Holy one of God not shine in a world filled with only sinners! But Jesus did more than stick out by His perfect loving words and actions. He went willing to the cross carrying all our fruitless deeds of darkness. Jesus was punished as one of God's enemies, and for three long dark hours on Calvary's cross the Son of God was cast into outer darkness. Jesus suffered on that cross until every last dark and deadly sin was paid. Jesus suffered for our darkness until His final breath. And on the third day the Sonlight of God's love shone brightest in the empty tomb as our eternal victory was won!

This is the victory that our eyes have been opened to see. Our baptisms have connected us to Jesus. The gospel has brought us into the wonderful light. The Holy Spirit, through Word and Sacrament, has taken us out of the dark by opening our eyes. We are no longer in the dark because the Spirit has given us spiritual understanding. By faith in Christ Jesus we are no longer God's enemies but His children, no longer on the path to eternal darkness, but on the way to heaven. "**For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.**"

So here comes the wise, practical advice to live by today and everyday: "**Live as children of light.**" In other words, be who you are. Be who God has made you to be in Christ Jesus. You are no longer controlled by the devil. Your baptism allows you to drown your sinful nature daily. You still live in this world but you are no longer of the world. Be you who are. "**Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.**" There is no question what fruits come from walking in the light of God's love - goodness, honesty,

kindness, patience and self-control to name a few. When it says here to find out what pleases the Lord this translation might be a bit misleading. Certainly, the Bible speaks (as John writes) about using God's Word to test and approve what God's will is because many false teachers are in the world. But the translation here really says to "*put your stamp of approval*" on what pleases God. In other words, you know what God's Word says, so do it. Be you who are in Christ. Shine in this world as the lights God made you. Expose sin. Love your neighbor. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness.

Paul's good and saving intent is beautifully wrapped up in this final quotation. We are not sure where these words are quoted from but many believe it is from a very early Christian hymn. But wherever it comes from it's invitation is clear both for the Christian sleeping in apathy or the unbeliever still in the dark. "***This is why it is said: 'Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'***" This is the ultimate goal for us and what we want for all, isn't it? This is the gospel's invitation. We want all to come out of darkness into Christ's wonderful light. We want all who are dead in sin to be made alive by God's grace and mercy. We want to shine in this world so that others might have Christ shine on them.

At times don't you think when it comes our Christian lives we make things out to be more difficult than how they should be? The same goes for our outreach or evangelism to others. This morning we are simply comforted and encouraged with this advice: "*Be who you are.*" God has made you and equipped you by His grace. So courageously go out now and be who you are in Christ Jesus dear friends. God has made you His child - so live in the peace and joy of being His child. God has brought you into His saving light - so live in that light by serving others in love. God has opened your eyes to the truth - so keep your eyes wide open for those who are still blind. God has given you salvation - so rejoice and give glory to God in all you do. Just be who you are in Christ Jesus. Amen.