

February 27, 2005
3rd Sunday in Lent
Ephesians 5:8-14
Pastor Ott

Live As Children of the Light

I don't remember which night it was this past week, but one of the nights this past week I went to bed and left the curtains open in our bedroom. I don't remember what time it was, but in the middle of the night it felt like someone shined a flashlight on me as I rolled over. It wasn't one of the kids. It wasn't someone with a flashlight. It was the moon. The bright moon that night came shining through and it was just like a beam was shining in on me. That was strange, kind of odd, but I managed to roll over and go right back to snoring.

We talk about it, don't we? Moonlight? Moonlight becomes you. All these different things we talk about with the moonlight but when you come right down to it, does the moon have any light of its own? The moon is just reflecting the sun's light, isn't it? And when the moon is like it was this past week, it is pretty bright at night. But the moon in and of itself doesn't produce the light, it reflects the light. But the moon, when it is in that position and there are no clouds in the sky, it cannot do anything else but reflect bright light onto our nights, right? That's just the way it is. It can't decide, "You know what? I am tired of being this light, I am going to just turn my back on reflecting the sun's light." It doesn't work. It is the very nature of the moon to do that.

This morning as we look at all these different scripture readings that talk about how Jesus would be the one who would not just heal the physically blind, but he would bring light to the spiritually blind. And the metaphors used over and over how light equals knowing that our sins are taken away through the life and death of Jesus and darkness means living somewhere else trusting in something else or trusting in ourselves or whatever the case may be. But unbelief has darkness and belief has light. We are told an important truth about ourselves. He doesn't say you should be light. He doesn't say work hard to be light. He says you ARE light in the Lord. The very nature of the faith the Holy Spirit has placed in your hearts is that you are Light.

The fact is that you and I might not always be the brightest light, but as Christians, we are light. So today, God encourages us to live as children of the light. Live in what we are by our very essence of being Christians. We live as children of the light as we are guided by God's light. That is the very nature—that is what children of light do. And then we live as children of the light as we reflect God's light. It's what we are. It's what we do. Now, we do this because we were once darkness but we now are light in the Lord. That was true for the Christians in Ephesus that Paul was writing to and it is true of us.

No one likes being described as being in the dark, do you? We like to think we know a lot of stuff. But by nature, we don't know the light that is God's love. When we are born into this world, we are born not knowing God. We are born spiritually blind, spiritually

dead, and enemies of God. We are born into this world separated from him and the things that come from who we are by that nature can only be things that are the fruit of darkness. The evil thoughts, the evil words, the anger, the hatred, the bitterness that we at times feel comes from the fact that we know that we were born into darkness. The remnant of it is still with us each and every day of our lives.

You don't have to go far to see the results or the remnants of that darkness in our lives, do you? All you have to do is go sit in the stands at a basketball game and that darkness shines brighter than the daylight, doesn't it? The ref misses a call. Did you ever hear any people say, "Well, that's okay"? The darkness that is in us, the anger that is in us, the bitterness that is in us gets us so caught up in the middle of a basketball game that it bubbles over.

It doesn't take a whole lot of convincing to see that we were once darkness because there is still so much of it there in our daily lives. There is so much of it there as we deal with one another. There is so much of it there as we deal with friends, neighbors, we deal with our close family and we say things to them that we would never say to a stranger. Darkness is there, it's all around us. But God tells us that's what you were. Sure it still surfaces to the top at times. It still bubbles over into our lives because we are still in a sinful world. But that has changed. Our status has been changed. The Ephesians' status was changed—our status has been changed—because now you are light in the Lord.

You and I didn't become light on our own. God made us light. Jesus came into this world, left the glory of heaven, took upon himself the nature of being true God and true man and lived under the law perfectly.

Now, they didn't have basketball in Jesus' day, but I know if they would have, he never would have said some of the things that I have said at a basketball game or that maybe you have said at a basketball game, because he was perfect. He never sinned in any of the sinful, petty ways that you and I think of as not being that big of a deal. He never even did those. We want to pat ourselves on the back and say, "I have never killed anyone. I'm a pretty good guy." But God reminds us hatred is murder. And Jesus never even went there. That's what makes us light in the Lord—that his life and his death in our place took away the sins of the whole world. And then we became light when the Holy Spirit entered into our hearts and led us to believe that what Jesus did for the world, he did for us individually.

Now this is our nature—we are light. And as light, what is the nature of light? Light shines into corners. Light makes things so they are easy to see. Light illuminates things. The fact that we are light means that we want to live in that light—that we want to be guided by God's light. Since you are children of light, he says to *live as children of the light and find out what pleases the Lord*.

He tells us to *find out what pleases the Lord* because he is telling us to be guided by the light of God's Word as we live to thank God that he has given us heaven. He says "*find out*". It's not that it's hard to find out. Finding out what God wants us to do or not to do is not a rubix cube. It's not some extremely hard puzzle. It's right in front of us. It's in

the bibles that are there on our shelves at home, or maybe on some tapes that we have some place. If we want to find out what pleases the Lord, all we have to do is get into the Word. And God tells us—do this and don't do that. Honor me with your life. Give me the first fruits of your wealth. Use your time and talents to serve me. But do it to thank him that he has already made us light. We don't do it to become light. We do it to honor and glorify him. We give him every last aspect of our lives, because he has loved us with this intense love.

The more we get into his Word, the more we find out that maybe our preconceived notions of what is good enough for God isn't good enough. Sometimes we act as though we do God favors when we serve him. God does us the favor of allowing us the privilege of serving him. God gives us the privilege of knowing why it is that you and I even want to serve him. We don't want to have anything to do with the deeds of darkness because now we have seen the brilliance of the light and that darkness is no longer as appealing to us. We want to do what is *the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth* because we have an intense and deep love for the God who first loved us.

So we are guided by God's light. We get into the Word. We learn the Word. And then we find the strength to do what God says as we make faithful use of the light in coming to his table and receiving his very body and blood and being told our sins are forgiven. All the silliness that you and I do because we are sinners, all the things that if you saw someone else do what you have done, you would say, "What an idiot"—those stupid things you and I do, they are all washed away in the Lord's Supper.

Be guided by his light and be strengthened by his love because one other great truth that we see today is not only are we to be guided by the light, but we are to reflect that light. Just like the moon reflects the sun's light. It's never quite as brilliant as the sun, but it reflects it because that is what it is. That is what it does.

You and I will not reflect the full brilliance of God's perfect love because we are sinners. But it is our very nature to reflect his light, and we do that as we share the gospel with others. We do that which Paul talks about *everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible*. The light that is God's love for the world in Christ makes things visible. We are to expose the deeds of darkness. We are to proclaim the law. But we don't do it just so others are shamed and humiliated. We don't do it just so that we feel better about ourselves because we've never done something so terrible. We expose the deeds of darkness for only one purpose. And that one purpose is so that the light of the gospel can comfort and heal hearts that are broken by the guilt of the deeds of darkness.

People around us struggle with guilt. You know it because you know how you have struggled with guilt at times. Now when that guilt is exposed as the deeds of darkness are exposed that we have done in our lives—it's not fun, it doesn't feel good. But nothing feels better in this lifetime than hearing someone say to us, "Christ has taken away your sins." "You are forgiven." That is the light that you and I are to reflect. That is the light that you and I are privileged to reflect. We don't have to say, "Go to church and hear my pastor say how Jesus took away your sins." We can tell people how Jesus

took away their sins. That he loved them enough to leave heaven and to live in their place. That he loved them enough to carry every last sin to Calvary and endure the agony of hell. That he loved them enough to do all of this so that when he was raised to life on that Easter, we would know that we have been declared NOT GUILTY.

You and I know this truth. I assume that is why we are here this morning, because we love this truth. But this truth isn't diminished as we reflect it into the lives of others. This truth produces a crop a hundred fold as God tells us—as you and I reflect the gospel message and share it with others. It's what we are. It's what we do. You and I have the task from God of getting rid of the clouds that cover up our light. Those clouds are our own sinfulness and pride and fears and anxieties. And we chase those clouds away as you and I rely on the firm promises of God and then live in a way that reflects his light and his love.