



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

www.mzluth.org

February 4, 2007
5th Sunday after Epiphany
Philippians 1:3-8
Pastor Dennis Kleist

First Lesson: Isaiah 6:1-8
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 67
Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 14:12b-20
Gospel: Luke 5:1-11

Jesus Lights up My Life

Epiphany is really a wonderful season of the year, isn't it? It follows Christmas. It just sets a positive time of the year. It means to shine, to throw light on, to reveal, and during the Epiphany season in the church year, we see how Christ is revealed as our Lord and Savior. We think about having Jesus show us who he is at his baptism when the dove descends on him, by his teachings and his miracles, and then at the end of the season, his glorious Transfiguration—here is Jesus—the Messiah, the Savior, the Light of the world.

What does that really mean for you as a Christian person? Does that affect your life that Jesus is the Savior? He is here. He is ours. It makes a big difference for me. I like to think of it in a way that says Jesus is the Light of the world and he lights up my life. I would like to share how he does that through our text this morning.

He lights up my life first of all by calling me and you into partnership with him and with millions of other Christians. And through that partnership, he lights up our life by giving us a most noble purpose—to do something that will affect people's lives for eternity. Did you ever think of that?—for eternity. Does it make you happy to think of it?—that you are a partner in the Gospel with him and with many others.

Paul was writing these words from prison and yet, that lit up his life to think that he was partnered with Christ and with these Philippians. Look what he says, *In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel* (Philippians 1:4, 5). You see, when he was praying for the Philippians, he was thinking of God's grace. He was thinking about what kind of people they were. They were heathens. They were unbelievers. They didn't want to have anything to do with God and his will and his way. They were bluntly on the way to hell, weren't they? But then Paul must have thought, "You know, the Lord called me by grace. He sent his Savior by grace. And he called me to preach the Gospel to them about that Savior, and they believed." When Paul thought about what they were and now what they had become—instead of unbelievers, they were believers in Christ; instead of opposing God, they were partners with him in sharing Christ; and instead of being on the way to hell, they were on the road to heaven. You can just imagine Paul with a smile creeping across his face as he thinks about this.

Do you ever feel that way about God's work in your life calling you to partnership? My guess is that here in Morrison many of you have been born and raised in this church. We are mostly Christians in this neighborhood, aren't we? We sometimes don't feel the thrill, the joy of being a Christian; but if you think of it, you were just like those Philippian Christians when you were born. You and I were just like any Muslim person when we were born. We are not believers by nature. Just like those Philippian Christians, we would have nothing to do with God's will and way. We would like to live for ourselves. As a result, we would simply be on our way to hell just like those people were.

But God sent Jesus into the world at Christmastime, and he sent someone to bring the Gospel to you and to me, and when we think about who we were and what we have become, we ought to have that smile just creep across our face too. We are partners with Christ now. You are a partner. In fact, Paul calls us coworkers with God once in a while. Think about that for your life.

We can see signs of our sinful nature. It is good for us to confess our sins. I often times think about that—how we can't stop from committing sins. That sinful nature shows itself with us. I think about George Washington's birthday coming up. He didn't tell a lie, but when George Washington's birthday comes up on February 22nd, just think—if God were to keep a record of all the lies we have told or will tell, how thick would that book be? It's our sinful nature.

God tells us we can trust in him and his providing providence. We don't have to worry, but you know what? I have seven children and five of them have driver's licenses. Do you think I can avoid worrying when I should be trusting God? I can't do that.

Today is Mission Festival. God says that he has called us into partnership to take the Gospel to the entire world, but do we always stand ready to sacrifice our time or maybe a friendship for witnessing Christ? Or sacrifice that Friday night fish fry or a sports game so we can have more money to give to missions? My heart isn't always in the right place and yet, by grace, he chose us. Paul says before the creation of the world he chose us to be adopted as his sons. He sent Christ and, by the shed blood of Christ, we are brought into partnership with him so that when we think about baptism, we should just be warmed inside that somehow the Gospel came to us. Christ should light up your life when you think about how many years you have heard the Gospel in its truth and purity and received the Sacrament. Or to think of what joy it should give us to think of our partnership in the Gospel which will continue as Paul said that we can have confidence in this that he will complete the work. And some day we are going to join him in heaven. That is reason for joy, no matter what our situation is.

So we are partners and now, to do what? Mission Festival reminds us of that. It reminds you of that—not just to ride along, but to share the Gospel as Paul did. I

want you to think of your partnership with people of the same faith. There are 400,000 Christians in our Wisconsin Synod, 1,262 congregations, and together we partner to share the Gospel, don't we? Do you know that you, through your partners and with your partners, have missionaries in 23 countries around the world? We are doing Christian work in many others, including Muslim countries like Nepal and Pakistan and Indonesia. You are doing that with your partners. Do you know that in partnership through your prayers and your offerings and in your encouragement, you are carrying out more than 100 home mission ministries? Just in the last two years, over 90 new ministry outreach projects have begun; 11 of them are Spanish speaking, 5 of them are Hmong speaking.

Do you know that you are partnered with other Christians in our Synod to train over 1,500 young people in our worker training schools to help them prepare for ministry? Do you know the schools?—Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw Michigan, Luther Preparatory School in Watertown, Wisconsin at the high school level, and then Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota where we receive about 95% of our pastors and teachers from that college, and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon. We couldn't do this on our own. Zion couldn't do it. The congregation I belong to, Mount Olive, in Appleton couldn't do it. But as partners, we can make a difference for eternity by proclaiming the Gospel of Christ.

That is really what I have come here to tell you about today, a special way of doing mission work which is rather new in our Synod, called Mission Partners. It's not that we haven't been doing mission work before. This congregation has been gathering mission offerings as long as it has existed. What do we do? The ushers will receive the offerings and we take and commit them to the Lord. Then they are counted and sent to Milwaukee, aren't they? There they are given to the different missions all over the world. That is wonderful! But then what happens?

In our Bible study this morning, I asked how many people could name three or four missionaries. That was a tough question. You see, the way we do mission work, we are not necessarily privileged to see what our missionaries are doing and the blessings that God has given and to hear about the stories. Mission Partners is a way in which individuals or families or entire congregations can connect up with one specific mission and can hear what the Lord is doing in that mission field.

For example, if you were connected to India, you would know that by the grace of God, we have only been there 10 years, but we have 13 men who have graduated from the Seminary; 27 are in Seminary training, and there are 70 all total in preparation for the pastoral ministry to serve over 8,000 people. Isn't that a joy? You are doing that through your partnership in the Gospel.

There are 70 mission and ministry projects that can be adopted. The adoption is for two years so that you get to know your missionary by name. You get to know

the faces of the people in that particular mission. Communication goes back and forth. The missionary has volunteered to send reports at least once a month with pictures. You talk about your family. You get to know what the culture is like. You learn to understand what the Lord is doing and some of the problems to pray for. If you were partnered with India, you would know that Pastor Mark Krueger also wrote in August that one of the evangelists went to a new village, a Hindu village, to preach the Gospel and he was threatened that if he would come back, he would be beaten. He did come back and he was beaten and he was told never to come back again or he would be killed. We could pray for that individual. We could pray for him by name.

Mission Partners is meant to create a relationship so that we can feel for our fellow Christians like Paul did where he says here, *It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart* (Philippians 1:7). As Christians, we miss out on that a lot, don't we?—that we are so connected to a specific mission field and people there that they are in our hearts.

You can adopt a home mission as well as a world mission. My congregation in Appleton adopted St. Thomas Church, a Hispanic mission in Phoenix, Arizona. Pastor Tim Otto sends us emails with pictures and he will be holding an English as a Second Language Class and he sends us pictures of maybe nine people in that class and gives us their names and asks us to pray for these people that they would come to faith. Once a month in our congregational prayer we pray for special people. Maybe they are starting Vacation Bible School or an outreach, but we can pray for that partnering with them.

I know some of the members of this congregation have gone to Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota. What do we know about that? Students can be adopted. A student far from home, maybe from California or from Florida, you can invite them to your home for a weekend and give them some good home cooking. Maybe a young lady studying to be a teacher—invite that person to talk to a Sunday school class or a grade school class and then you could reciprocate and she will invite you to go over to the campus for a weekend for a play or a concert and show you what it is like to prepare for the ministry, but there is a heart connection there. That is what Mission Partners does that is different.

My friends, we have a wonderful partnership—world missions all around the world and home missions across our country and in our schools. Right now there about 40 congregations in our district that have a partner and many individuals and families. Some of your neighbors, like St. John St. James in Reedsville, they have chosen India. St. John's in Wrightstown is partnered with Apache Lutheran School in East Fork, and they encourage their members in the cold of winter to take a vacation to Arizona and stop in and visit and meet the students and the teachers. But whatever the project, this is a way you can get involved with missions so that Paul's sentiment is reflected when he says, *God*

can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:8). We send not only our dollars, but our hearts.

My friends, thank God this morning that God is using all of us for partnership in the Gospel around the world. He is really blessing your work. You are partnered with the same God and have the same Gospel that St. Paul did. May it light up your life to know that you are doing all of this work. May it light up your life to know that you are making a difference for eternity.

Thank you for that partnership already. Enjoy it and let it be part of your life and part of the purpose for which you are here.