



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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December 5, 2012

Midweek Advent

Sermon Text: [John 3: 1-21](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 24](#)

Scripture of Prophecy: [Isaiah 35:1-10](#)

Scripture of Fulfillment: [Matthew 11:2-11](#)

Hark the Glad Sound! The Savior Comes

He Comes to Those in Darkness

Grace, mercy and peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow redeemed:

Light versus darkness does not make for a real good quiz, right? If I ask you, "Is it light or dark out?" It's not real hard. If you are sitting on that side of the church, it's obvious. The sun is shining in those windows, so it's obvious it's light. It's not a real good quiz. But not so fast. When Jesus comes into the world to those who live in the darkness, he comes to people that live in a darkness that doesn't always appear so dark. I think that's a truth that we often forget.

It's a truth that is clearly seen as he talks with Nicodemus. You kind of wonder, Nicodemus, one of the members of the ruling council, the Sanhedrin, one of the Pharisees, the teachers of the Law, you wonder if he came to Jesus that night and kind of went from shadow to shadow. If someone had a torch burning someplace, you wonder if he kind of covered it up a little bit so no one would see where he was going, so he could stay in the darkness, not realizing the true darkness that he was really in. If anyone from the outside looked at Nicodemus, they saw a fine upstanding man. This is what you want your children to grow up to be. He's one of the Pharisees. He's one of the guys that is a teacher of the Law. He knows his stuff. He's closer to God than you and I would ever be. That's how you would have looked at it back then. Not only is he a Pharisee, but he's one of the ruling council, a member of the Sanhedrin. If anyone is close to God, it's got to be Nicodemus. But when he gets there at night and starts talking to Jesus, you start to see just how much darkness he was living in.

He recognizes that Jesus must be from God because of the signs, the miracles and the wonders Jesus had done. No one could do that without God's blessing and help. He could see it with his own eyes. He understood that much. But he comes to Jesus and says, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. No one could perform the miraculous signs you were doing if God were not with him." Then Jesus hits him with something he isn't expecting. It's not an acknowledgment of these words of high praise that come from a religious big wig. Instead Jesus looks at him in the eyes and says, "I tell you the truth. No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." If that was a multiple choice on a quiz, which answer are you going to give

if you are Nicodemus on what you expect Jesus to say to you, that isn't the one you are going to mark, right? You have to be born again? What's he talking about? You can't enter your mother's womb a second time. What in the world could he possibly be talking about? You can almost start to hear the wheels spinning in Nicodemus' head as Jesus says this to him.

What Jesus is trying to do is get him to see that it's not all about him. It's about God. It's about God's promises. It's about the promises that the Son of Man would come into the world. To show him it's not all about him, he talks about the wind will blow wherever it will. So it is with those that are going to be born of the Spirit. The Spirit is the one that has to give birth to Spirit because when we are born of this world, we are sinners. We are flesh that gives birth to flesh. Sinners give birth to sinners. So we need the Spirit to have us born again so we are connected to God. God has to do it. We can't do it. But that's where Nicodemus, who other people had looked at as a shining light because he did all these things in the open for people to see, and he taught the Law, he knew the Old Testament better than the people did, but he had bought into Satan's lie that had developed that by doing good and being good you were right with God. That's why the Pharisees would always come and throw questions at Jesus like, "Why don't your disciples wash their hands and follow the traditions of the teachers like ours do?" Jesus would answer them with things like, "Why do you follow traditions that break the Word of God? God says 'Honor your father and mother.' You have a tradition that says, 'Every support I would have given to my father and mother, it's now devoted to the Lord, so now I don't have to support my father and mother anymore if they need my help.'" Jesus points out the falseness of their thinking because they had drifted away from the promises of God and focused on the Law of God.

Darkness doesn't always appear dark. Nicodemus did not appear to live in darkness to the people of Jerusalem. Jesus, who knows what's in a man's heart, he calls him and says, "You don't believe. I'm talking about earthly things and you don't believe. How are you going to believe if I talk about heavenly things?" He calls Nicodemus out on the carpet and says, "You aren't a believer. You are not right with God." That's what Nicodemus needed to hear.

He needed to learn that God acts in different ways. God does everything. Just as Moses lifted up the bronze snake in the desert and that snake did nothing to heal the people (it was the promise of God that healed the people), so in the same way the Son of Man must be lifted up. You have to wonder how those words echoed in Nicodemus' head when he watched the crucifixion.

Darkness doesn't always appear dark. It's not a logical statement, but it's very true spiritually. Those that live in darkness, apart from the light of God, the light of God's Gospel, those that don't believe that Jesus is the Savior of the world and their own personal Savior, to all outward appearances don't appear a whole lot different at times

from a believer. They can be nice, loving neighbors. They can be kind and loving people. Hell is going to be full on one wing of kind, loving people who just don't believe that Jesus is their Savior. I think this is one of the things we forget.

I talk in various classes about whether or not you know anyone going to hell. I'm always told by people "no." That boggles my mind that our members say "I don't know anyone going to hell." Really? Start paying attention. The person that takes your money at a gas station. Do you think they are going to heaven? How do you know? When you go sit and watch grandkids play sports down at the park in the summer, is everyone on those stands going to heaven? Really? Just because they look like you and dress like you and act like you and yell at umpires like you? We don't know. But we know the only answer is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They are living in darkness. We are not going to shine a flashlight in their eyes and say "Now, do you really, really believe?" What we want to do is be ready to share the Gospel with everyone whenever the Lord gives us the opportunity.

Jesus had the advantage. According to his divine nature, he is true God and knows everything. He knew Nicodemus was going to show up according to his divinity. He knew what he would say to him. You and I don't have that ability. So our God tells us to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ so you are always ready to give an answer for the hope that you have."

We are light bearers. We who live in the light are light bearers. We are the ones that bring the message of the Gospel to those living in darkness. Those living in darkness aren't always going to be those that look like they should be locked up. They are going to be people that look just like you and just like me. So always be ready to share that light because the Gospel is the only thing that changes them.

Jesus then speaks a little more clearly. "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." This is pretty clear. It's all about God. It's not about what you do, Nicodemus. It's why it's one of the first passages we learn because it truly is the Gospel in a nutshell. It's all about God. God did it all. We receive all the blessings. Nicodemus is probably starting to grasp that part. The Spirit is working in his heart. Did the Spirit work to change him from darkness to light?

Four chapters later, in the Gospel of John, in Chapter 7, I don't know how long it is later but it's later when the Pharisees send some guards after Jesus. They want to arrest Jesus and bring him in. The guards come back and say "Hey, no one has ever talked like this guy. We couldn't arrest him. He makes way too much sense and speaks with too much power. You can see he is from God." The Pharisees weren't real happy. They start chewing out the guards and say "Are you teachers of the Law? None of the Pharisees believe in him. How can you lowly guards think you know God's Word better than us?" You can almost hear them thundering at them. Then all of a sudden, after

saying none of the Pharisees believe in him, and you don't know the Law, then Nicodemus stands up and says "Doesn't our law say that we should give someone a hearing before we arrest them?"

Here is Nicodemus standing up for Jesus in the middle of an angry crowd. They didn't want to hear it. They said "Go and check it out. The prophet will never come from Galilee. You just don't know anything Nicodemus." They try to defend themselves.

Then you know what Nicodemus did at Jesus' crucifixion? Peter had denied Jesus. The rest of the disciples were hiding behind locked doors. It is Nicodemus who steps forward to claim the body and give it a decent burial. When Jesus says, "Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God," I wonder if those words were echoing in Nicodemus' head when he had to go and say "Give me the body." Now it is going to be plain for everyone to see that he was a believer in Jesus.

Before I said those that live in darkness don't always appear dark. They quite often look and act like you and me. That's true to a point. We have a sinful nature and we are going to do foolish things. They can be kind and loving like we are kind and loving. But there should always be one difference. God says, "Whoever lives in the truth comes into the light so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God. That involves not only doing the right thing but being ready to give an answer for the hope that you have. When someone says "Why do you do that?" "I just want to do something nice. I just want to help," is that what you say? Or do you say "Because I have a Savior who lived, died and rose again for me, and this is my privilege to live for him." Or would that be too much of a religious nut so I can't talk about my Jesus?

We fail him, don't we? Here's the thing... he forgives us and he gives us the opportunity to go and serve him more faithfully in the future, to walk in that light, to live in that light, and to enjoy the warmth of that light because we know that light assures us we are forgiven, and that light guides us and motivates us to want to do what is right and give all credit to Jesus. Amen.