



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

March 23, 2014

Pastor Randy Ott

Lent 3

First Lesson: [Isaiah 42:14-21](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 143](#)

Second Lesson: [Ephesians 5:8-14](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 9:1-7, 13-17, 34-39](#)

Sermon Text: [Ephesians 5:8-14](#)

Islands in the Son: An Island Full of Sonlight

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

During the Sundays in Lent, we are focusing on Islands in the Son. As a reminder, the Sundays in Lent aren't part of the season of repentance itself, so on the Sundays we focus on what God has done for us and rejoice (although it's muted during the season of Lent), rejoice in who God is and what he has done for us. We're kind of using the picture of this time of the year...a lot of people like to go to a tropical island where it's nice and warm. Where there isn't snow. Where there is sun that actually warms you, not like the sun we have today that just deceives you. You think it's going to be nice and warm and you walk outside without a coat on, and you walk back in because you need a coat on, right? We're using that picture of Islands in the Son to remind us of things about our God.

I don't know if you know some of the people that maybe took trips and went to tropical islands for a little break during this time of the year, but if they were as white as my gown when they left, when they came back they didn't look the same, right? They got a little bit of sun. You don't go to a tropical island to sit in your room or sit under an umbrella, right? You go there to get into that nice warm sun and enjoy it and bask in it. Then you talk about sunbathing and all that kind of stuff. You want that. That's part of what you want. So you see the people when they come back. Of course, nowadays you have to kind of wonder if they've just been going and laying in those weird beds that are going to bake them a little bit, or did they actually go someplace nice and warm? When you see them when they come back, they do have that nice tan.

But over time it fades, right? It starts going away and pretty soon, unless you're going to go lay on those beds and bake, you're as pasty white as you were before you left. It would kind of be nice if it would stick around a little longer, wouldn't it? You could enjoy that sunlight. That warmth of that sunlight. We get all excited this year when we hit 30°F and 40°F. It would be kind of nice to be sitting around someplace where it's 70°F or 80°F, wouldn't it?

As you think about basking in that kind of sunlight, we want to focus this morning on how God points us to enjoying the sunlight of the Son, enjoying the light of Christ.

That's what Paul writes to the Ephesians about. He had talked to them about how they were separated from God when they were born, earlier in his letter. They had nothing that they could do to bring themselves to God. They were separated from God and they deserved to spend eternity in hell because they, like you and me, were sinners. They had nothing they could offer God. He makes it really clear in Ephesians, doesn't he? You're not saved by works. It's by grace. It's the gift of God. It's what God has done for us, not what we do for God, that gives us the confidence that we can bask in the light of Jesus because he did it all. He is that light that changes us. He tells us it's all Jesus' doing.

Now, when you get to Chapter 5, he tells us that because Jesus did everything and the Spirit has given you the gift of faith that Jesus is your Savior, you are changed. Like it says in the introduction to the Readings in your Service Folder, Paul doesn't say you are in the light. He says you ARE light. You've been radically changed through faith in Christ. That comes about because you spend time in this light. When you spend time in the light that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, you also reflect that light. Isn't that what he said in there? "Everything that is illuminated becomes a light." You are light. You are a light. That's what God tells us today through Paul.

We live in this place of refreshment where we bask in the light that is Jesus. He didn't have to come and take away our sins. You have nothing that you can lay claim to on Jesus taking away your sins and opening heaven to you except that he promised it. He doesn't do it because you're so good or you try so hard. He doesn't do it because you're going to do better in the future. He loves you and forgives you because that's who he is.

That's hard for us at times to understand. Many people can't wrap their heads around it. They think it's got to be about what they do. "Yes, I know I've screwed up. But I'm going to try hard to do better in the future Lord, so please forgive me." That's not the basis of your forgiveness or my forgiveness. If that were the case, I don't think I could sleep at night. I know we shouldn't be able to because we can't do what we want to do. That's why it has to all be about God. It has to be about what he did for us. Our forgiveness is based on the fact that Jesus is the light of the world that came into this world and took away our sins.

He lived in our place. He died in our place. He did that for the whole world. And then he pours the light of the good news about what he has done into our hearts through things like what we saw this morning. Through something as simple as water and the Word, he clothed Benjamin in his perfection. He washed away Benjamin's sins. That's what God does for each of us in our baptism.

In the Word, he comes to us and shows us what we are by nature. We are filthy rotten sinners, but he's taken away that sin. That's the light that shines on us, that warms our hearts, and that shows us that we are forgiven. We come to his altar, his very body and blood that was given and poured out to take away our sins is given to us and he says, "You are forgiven. You are now light. You're my child." As light then we want to live in

the light, as it said in what I read to you from Ephesians. This means we don't want to do all the things that God tells us not to do.

The Ephesians that Paul was writing to had spent a lot of time doing what they thought was worship of their gods with things that they found out were sin. They would go to the temple and the temple prostitutes and that's how they would worship their god. Now they found out God had said don't commit sexual sins. Sex belongs inside of marriage, not outside of it. Now they looked at everything they had done and they see how they failed the true God and they were troubled by it. Paul tells them "You're forgiven in Christ. Now you are light. You are forgiven. Don't beat yourself up over your failings. Know that Christ has taken them away, but now live as children of the light." That means don't conform anymore to the darkness. You know it's wrong. Don't do it. How are you going to know if it's wrong? He says "Make sure to find out what is pleasing to God. Find out what pleases the Lord and then have nothing to do with what God says is wrong, but rather expose them." It's pretty simple to hear and understand that, isn't? But it's really hard to do.

It says in here it's shameful to talk about what people do in darkness. We live in a society that loves to talk about what should be shameful to talk about, right? You can't go online and do a search without having something show up in the results that you shouldn't be looking at or clicking on, right? We are bombarded with this stuff. There is that sinner that lives inside of each of us yet that gets kind of interested in it, and we embrace it more than we should. It's a struggle. It's a terribly hard struggle for each and every Christian who wants to do what God wants them to do, but we find so many things leading us back into darkness.

So what is the solution? It's again not in you. The solution is to find out what pleases the Lord and let the Lord strengthen you by going back to the waters of your baptism, by spending time in his Word, by making faithful use of the Lord's supper and seeing yourself for what you are. You are a sinner and you're going to fail your God. No matter how much you want to do what is right before him, you're going to sin. All the temptations around you are going to lead you into it.

So how do you react when you sin? Don't do what is natural for yourself. Don't make excuses. Don't say everybody does it. Don't say "Well it's different now, pastor. It's not like it was in those times." It isn't different. God doesn't change. He says to find out what pleases him. That tells you there is something that pleases him and something that doesn't. I don't care if the world says just do what you think is right. God says "Do what I think is right." But you and I won't even though we want to.

And when we don't, then just repent. Just say, "Lord, for the sake of Christ, forgive of this sin." And then rejoice in your forgiveness. Then, forgiven by your God, find out what pleases him and live for him. Be what you are. Be the light God has made you. That means you don't tell someone else the excuses and why it's okay that you said or did that to that person because they're a jerk. Just say, "What I did was wrong. Forgive me for the sake of Christ." If we quit making excuses and we just live in the light, the

light of knowing that God has taken that sin away, then we'll all of a sudden start figuring out that Christianity isn't about keeping rules. It's about the fact that Jesus kept the rules for you. Now when you say, "I want to do what pleases God," it's not a matter of I have to. It's a matter of I want to. Any God that loves me that much, I want to honor. I want to be light. I want to reflect that light. I want to share that light with others. That's one of the things we are trying to equip people to do with this Bible study of *Come Follow Me* with the videos. We are showing the video and then making it available so you can take it and share it with other people that need to hear that it's what Jesus has done for them. This is one of the ways that we live as light.

We point one another to Christ. We don't dwell on our misdeeds. We don't speak about the things we shouldn't be speaking about. Instead we can say to each other, "Turn away from sin and turn to Christ and know that Christ has forgiven you." Then we become his messengers and share it with the world. There's nothing, there's nothing cooler than talking about how our Lord loves us. We don't deserve it. We don't earn it. Yet he does it. So live it. Rejoice it. Amen.