

“Wake Up! Children of Light”
Sermon by Lisa Crismore
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Ephesians 5:8-14

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

The author of this letter to the church in Ephesus uses contrasting imagery between darkness and light. How many of you were scared of the dark when you were a child? You may even be scared of the dark as an adult. What is it about the dark that is so scary? Is it because we can't see what is around us? We don't know if we are alone or not? In the dark, it is difficult to find your way and we can get lost.

I remember going to Ft. Ben park to hike once in the late fall. It was an unusually warm November day and I had lost track of time. I had forgotten how dark it would be at 4pm in the woods. I began to panic for fear that I would lose my way. I did have my phone with me but I wasn't sure when the park closed their gates. I began to run! Thankfully, I made it to my car before the sun had set but noticed the park ranger driving by as I turned the key in my ignition.

Many times artist will use darkness and light or black and white to portray evil and good. We see it in the Star Wars movies – the evil Darth Vader in black going against Luke Skywalker in white. The use of lighting can portray a feeling. Death, violence and or destruction is usually always depicted in scenes that have very little light. Horror movies are usually shot at night and many times when it is storming. Love stories, comedies or warm-fuzzy movies are frequently shot using bright light and sunshine.

Light is great at exposing everything. Our vision can focus clearly when we have light. It is light from a flashlight that helps us find our way or the lighthouse guiding the ships safely to shore at night. It is sunlight that makes us feel good. It is the warm sunny days that we welcome and rejoice over when gloomy, dark winter ends and spring comes (like the last 2 days).

We receive this letter in Ephesians as we cross over the half way point in our Lenten journey. This is the time we use to prepare ourselves to receive the newness of Christ at the empty tomb on Easter morning. One of the ways we prepare is what the letter says, “Wake up!” Flip on the examining light like a dentist uses when checking your teeth out for any decaying cavities. What needs to stay and what needs to go? What darkness is being exposed in your life?

We hear in the Gospel of John that Jesus Christ is the light of the world. Christ takes that light and shines it on us. This light of Christ gives us a new identity. We become children of light. This identity is about doing what is good, right and true. This is how we are fruitful. The question comes down to this, “What is pleasing to the Lord?” And The Message says, “Once you figure it out, then do it!”

It is a choice. It is clear that God chooses us by sending us Christ so that we are free. But, do we respond by choosing God? Do we take on the identity of children of light?

You know sometimes darkness cannot be so easily seen. We can get caught up in what society says is good, right and true. During the 1950s and early 60s, society had deemed it good, right and

true to segregate African-American people and white people. African Americans could not use the same bathroom as white people. They could not sit together on the bus, go to the same school or college or check out the same books in the library. In the movie "Hidden Figures, which is based off of a true story, 3 brilliant African-American women use their God-given intelligence to work with a team to put the first Americans safely into space. Katherine Global, Dorothy Vaughan and Mary Jackson were brilliant mathematicians. But because of their race and sex, they had to be persistent in shining their lights in the midst of the darkness to be heard. Because they identified as being children of light, they were able to make a difference.

The other thing about darkness is that it can hide things really well. The things we don't want to expose in the light can be hidden in our dark closets. The things we have a difficult time confronting so we ignore them. We keep them buried deep within us. Fifteen women at John Knox have joined together to read the book, Two Steps Forward. One of the characters in the book is named, Hannah. She is finding herself grieving the fact that she can't have any children. One of the women in their circle of friends is pregnant. The story takes place in Advent so the imagery of the pregnant mother Mary keeps surfacing. Hannah realizes that she has not dealt with the realization that she can't have any children and how sad this makes her. She is confronted with the need to process this inner darkness. This can no longer be stuffed inside of her. She must work through it because only then can she identify herself as a child of light.

On a more personal note, I will have to say that when God's light exposes my darkness I am not very proud of what I see. I reflect on people I have hurt. I know I have made poor decisions without discerning God's will. I am sure there is not a day that goes by that I don't pollute the planet. I can get caught up in society's demand for consumerism and buy stupid stuff. I can be selfish and mean. I can gossip and judge others harshly. The list can go on and on. But the beauty of God's light filled grace is that it can transform me. When I choose to identify myself as a child of light I can change. It isn't easy. Because Christ's light shines on me and I choose to walk in the light, I am a better person.

I want to end by sharing a Lenten Poem by Ann Weems. (Kneeling in Jerusalem; "Lent"; 1992; Westminster/John Knox Press; p. 20)

Lent is a time to take time to let the power
of our faith story take hold of us,
a time to let the events get up
and walk around in us,
a time to intensify our living unto Christ,
a time to hover over the thoughts of our hearts,
a time to place our feet in the streets of Jerusalem
or to walk along the sea and listen to his Word,
a time to touch his robe
and feel the healing surge through us,
a time to ponder and a time to wonder....
Lent is a time to allow a fresh new taste of God!
Perhaps we're afraid to have time to think,
for thoughts come unbidden.
Perhaps we're afraid to face our future knowing our past.
Give us courage, O God, to hear your Word
and to read our living into it.
Give us the trust to know we're forgiven
and give us the faith
to take up our lives and walk with you.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayers of the People (Prayer of Examen used):

Gracious God, as we breath in and breathe out help us to know that you are closer than the very breath we take. As Christ followers, you call us to be children of light. We know that you are always with us casting your light on all that we do and say. But sometime we forget that you are near and we fall into darkness. As you we pray today, help us to look over the last 24 hours of our life. We ask that your Spirit guide our time of reflection.

- What inspired gratitude today?
- What happened that was painful, sad, or disappointing?
- What moments of my day were life-giving?
- What moments of my day were life-draining?
- When did you sense God's nearness?
- When did your hectic pace of life crowd out a sense of God's nearness?
- When did you give and receive love?
- When did you feel an absence of love?
- Are there areas of your life where you feel you were resisting God's presence or not listening carefully enough to God's will? Are there actions or thoughts that require God's forgiveness? The forgiveness of others?
- In what ways do you believe God may be calling you to a new awareness, a change of heart, to different actions?

Loving God, we are thankful for your presence in our lives and we are especially give thanks for the blessings that we received and those things that brought us joy. Help us to discover the things that please you. We know the good news is that you are a patient God and you are with us every step of the way. Guide us as we travel these last 20 days of Lent to experience the suffering and resurrection of Christ with eyes wide open.

Now as children of light, we pray the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven

Hallowed be thy name,

Thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts and we forgive our debtors and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. AMEN