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## The Fourth Sunday in Lent March 19, 2023

### The Light of the World Overcomes the Darkness of Sin

Just as total darkness makes sight impossible, so the dense gloom of sin obscures the bright path that leads to God. Jesus came to overcome sin and so he became the Light of the world. Tragically, the darkness of sin never stops creeping in on the light that Jesus brings and often leads to spiritual blindness and the loss of sight that saves. We believers bask in the light of Christ and expose and avoid the deeds of darkness.

#### Sermon Ephesians 5:8-14

**For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said: “Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”**

Introduction - His day started like any other day. A friend led him to the road leading up to the temple, a road with plenty of foot traffic. He sat down on the side of the road, as he did every day, and begged. Begged for just a couple coins, so that he could survive. This had been his life for as long as he could remember. But today would turn out to be a very different day. He listened as a group of people's feet came to a stop close by. There was some conversation back and forth among the group, until one of them got closer to him. He heard him spit on the ground, then felt mud rubbed in his eyes. The man leaned down and told him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.” So, he did, and his life was never the same.

Jesus is the man with the power to transform blindness into sight, darkness into light. “I am the light of the world,” he said. Jesus is also the man with the power to turn spiritual blindness into spiritual sight, spiritual darkness into spiritual light. You heard Jesus say to the Pharisees, “For judgement I came into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.” Jesus made the blind beggar see. He also made the blind beggar see spiritually: he gave him faith. But those who thought they could see spiritually, the Pharisees who were against Jesus, ended up being the spiritually blind ones all along.

There are two categories of people in that story: the blind beggar, who ended up in spiritual light, and the intellectual Pharisees, who were stumbling in spiritual darkness. These categories haven't gone anywhere: everyone living on earth today also falls into one of the two categories: you're either living in the light of Christ or in the darkness of sin. It sounds simple; it is simple; but it doesn't always seem simple to us. We often feel like following Christ is more gray than black and white. That's why Paul's words in Ephesians 5 are so important. Paul unpacks the effects and the repercussions of Christ's light shining into a world that desperately wants to remain in the darkness. Paul tells us how

## Christ's Light Shines In Us and Through Us.

### I. In Us

Before the apostle Paul came to Ephesus, the Ephesians were living without Christ's light. Ephesus was a business hub. The people there cared most of all about making money, and they did a good job of it: Ephesus was one of the wealthiest cities in the Roman empire. So, in his letter, Paul reminded the Ephesians that although in their old life they were making profits, they were in spiritual darkness that was completely profitless before God.

Paul reminds us here today in Mequon, Wisconsin of our old situation with these same words. **You were darkness**, he says. Not "you were in darkness." You were darkness. You were spiritually blind, like those Pharisees. This darkness affected our whole lives. This darkness was like what your four-year-old self thought about darkness: scary, easy to get lost in, easy to hurt yourself in, when robbers come and steal and get away with it. This is what we were: we were lost, we were hurting ourselves, we were sinning, thinking no one could see us so we couldn't get caught. We were spiritual darkness. We were where Christ's light wasn't. We were outside of the gospel: we were not forgiven. We did not know how to gain forgiveness. And we couldn't get out of the darkness—we couldn't fumble around long enough until we found the light switch—because we were darkness. We couldn't do anything to avoid sin and reach for God.

**You were darkness**, Paul says, **but now you are light in the Lord**. We couldn't become light, so Jesus shined his light on us. He physically came into our world of darkness by being born as a human so that he could shine light on us spiritually. He shined his forgiveness on us by dying for our sins on the cross. And then, Easter Sunday, the brightest day in history, when Jesus shined victory over death onto the whole world. Forty days later, Jesus ascended into heaven, but his light didn't leave us: he has made us his light. Christ's light shines in us. Before our baptism, before our faith, we were darkness. Now, because of Jesus, we have spiritual sight. We have spiritual perspective, spiritual understanding. We know our sins are forgiven.

When darkness creeps into your life, remember that Christ's light shines in you. When you are scared, be it of medical issues, be it of an impending recession, be it for a loved one, remember that Christ's light gives you confidence that he is taking care of all things for your benefit. When you feel lost, remember that Christ has placed you where you are for good of his kingdom. When you sin against God or against others, remember that Christ's forgiveness is yours, and yours to offer to others. You were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Christ's light shines in us.

Our lives changed completely after Christ showed us his light, just as the blind beggar's life was never the same. When Jesus gave him sight, he didn't return back to his place of begging every day just as if nothing had happened. He went and told everyone the amazing news. He went out and used his sight. Since we've been transformed from darkness to light, we want to go live as light, we want to use our newfound sight, we want Christ's light to shine through us to others. And Paul tells us how to do so.

### II. Through Us

He says: **Walk as children of the light**. Everywhere you walk, everything you do, do it as a child of Christ. Just like children mimic their parents, study Jesus's actions in the gospels and mimic them. **Walk as children of the light**, and then Paul gets even more specific: **for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth**. What do those words mean: goodness, righteousness, and truth? A young woman, mid-thirties, showed up at a church one Sunday morning in Manhattan, New York. After the service, the pastor

introduced himself and asked her how she heard about the church. She told him her story: She was, like many people in Manhattan, working to climb the corporate ladder. She was having success, and would soon be in line for another promotion. But, she made some error, some mistake, a mistake so huge that she would be fired and would have to start her career all over. She was devastated—all those years of extra hours gone to waste. But when the higher-ups came to ask what happened, before she could stand up and acknowledge her error, her manager stepped in and took full responsibility for what she did. She hadn't asked him to do this—she hadn't even thought of it, because why would he? It meant that his career would be stunted, all the work that he had put in—much more than her—would go to waste. And yet he did it. Afterwards, she raced over to his office and demanded to know why he'd taken the fall for her. Eventually, she got it out of him: "Because I'm a Christian." She had to know what church he went to that would teach its people to act so selflessly, so he pointed her to his church in downtown Manhattan. That's living as a child of the light. That's goodness—doing all you can to help someone, even if it hurts you. That's righteousness—doing for someone as you would want them to do for you. That's truth—taking the blame for a sin when you could pass it off without anyone knowing. That's mimicking Christ, who showed us how to live with all goodness, righteousness, and truth by taking our sins upon him and paying the price instead of us.

But it's easier said than done to let Christ's light shine through you. Although Christ has made us children of light, we are surrounded by and attacked by darkness every day. Darkness doesn't just have one tactic. It hides itself in many ways. It puts on an attractive face! It promises social standing, it promises pleasure, it promises contentment. And make no mistake: deeds of darkness can win you those things in this world. But spiritually, in God's eyes, darkness can't deliver on any promise. Paul calls those deeds of darkness, those things we do to get social standing, pleasure, or contentment, **fruitless**. Profitless. **Have nothing to do with them**, he says, **it is shameful even to mention them**. The darkness also has a special tactic for the children of the light. We've all heard it whisper in our ear, "You do so many good things, righteous things, truthful things...give yourself a break. Do this one thing. It's not hurting anybody, and no one will know." But the darkness cannot hide sins because Christ's sinless light shines everywhere. **Everything exposed by the light becomes visible**. This is why Paul lovingly but urgently calls out to us, **Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you**. Don't be lulled to sleep by the darkness. Don't deny your sins. Don't think they are hidden from God.

**Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you**. Christ was never lulled to sleep by the darkness. He was always vigilant and acting in goodness, righteousness, and truth. Christ's light shines to all parts of our lives as children of light. Yes, it exposes our hidden sins, but then it reminds us of how every single one is washed out, bleached out, in his sinless light. His light replaces those sinful actions with deeds of goodness, righteousness, and truth.

Since Christ's light shines in us, it also shines through us. It shines through us in two ways. First, it exposes the sins of fellow Christians. **Have nothing to do with the deeds of darkness, but rather expose them**. Christ's light exposes our sins first, then we, as forgiven children of light, notice the sins of our fellow believers. We know firsthand how dangerous and deceptive the darkness is, and we don't want our friends to give in. Part of the reason God makes us light is so that we can help our Christian friends realize their sins. Like a doctor diagnosing a malignant tumor, we care about them to point out their sin, explaining how dangerous and profitless it is. And then, when they turn away from their sins back to the godly path Christ has lit up for them, we rejoice with them.

Second, Christ's light shines through us when we share the gospel with others. So many people are living in spiritual blindness with no clue that forgiveness and purpose and heaven is for them. Children of the light shine on the spiritually blind, just as Christ shined on us. Through us, Christ's light wakes up those sleepers. **Everything that is illuminated becomes a light**. The more and more people believe in the gospel message, the more and more light conquers darkness.

Sadly, there will be many who reject spiritual sight. For every one blind beggar to whom Jesus gives sight, there will be Pharisees who prefer to remain in darkness. But not us. We are light. Christ paid the ultimate price to give you spiritual sight. Don't go back to your old darkness! Christ's light shines in you and through you every day until you go to live in heavenly light forever. Amen.

This sermon was preached by Seminarian Jacob Borgwardt