

Light is As Light Does
The United Church of Broomfield
March 19, 2023

Ephesians 5:8-14 (NRSVue)

⁸for once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Walk as children of light, ⁹for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness; rather, expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly, ¹³but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

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

As most of you know I was gone the last two weeks on vacation. Adam and I took a trans-Atlantic cruise. If you've ever cruised before you know there are “port days” (days when the ship is docked in a port) and “sea days” (days when the ship is at sea, traversing from one point to the next). In my experiences, most people I've talked with like cruises where there aren't many sea days; instead of wasting time on water, they'd rather spend every day in a new port, a new city and with new adventures. Sea days are boring.

Yes, that can be true, but they can also be great for relaxing. You can't really go anywhere, so you're forced to relax, to read, to watch movies or shows, to sit at the pool and to eat. Our 11-day trans-Atlantic cruise consisted of 10 sea days – TEN. The point of the cruise was to NOT be in different cities or ports, but to just...sail along.

One random day I was sitting in our cabin, *sailing along*, and I turned on the television. In the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, television isn't great, so you're relegated to a few options; one of which was one movie each day, looped repeatedly. That day, the movie was Forest Gump. I'm sure we've all seen the movie. For me, it's one of those movies that if I'm channel surfing and I see it, I'll often stop and watch for a few minutes; to reflect, enjoy and appreciate it.

You'll remember that Forrest always had a quote from his mama to sum up just about any situation that a person might find themselves in. As I thought of today's sermon and the passage from Ephesians, I thought about Forrest and his mama's sayings. Forrest might respond to this scripture as such, "It's like my mama always used to say, 'Light is as light does.' "

Light is as light does. And what light does is shine out of the darkness. What light does is to make darkness disappear. Light and darkness cannot exist in the same space, because anytime light shows up, it pushes the darkness away. Darkness can exist on the edge of light, but it can never invade the space light has claimed.

Our lives regularly seem to be filled with gray areas; areas that are not fully illuminated nor are they fully darkened. As we encounter the gray areas of life, we try to make sense of them and determine **HOW** we

should engage and respond. There emerge choices and we start to assign “rightness” and “wrongness” to said choices; “light and dark.”

We are taught that “right choices” lead to light and conversely, “wrong choices” lead to darkness. It seems so easy and simple ... but we all know that life, particularly a Christian life, full of grey areas, isn’t easy or simple.

The scripture for today is a small portion of a letter that Paul is writing to the church in Ephesus. The church is in the midst of a lot of “grey,” and truthfully, darkness as well – certainly struggles. In our text it tells us: "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." The grey areas of life are the sleep from which we can awake, or even death, from which we can rise. And when we escape those gray areas, Christ will shine on us. Not only will he shine on us, he will shine out from us.

As Christians, we believe Jesus is the light of the world (John 8:12). He illuminates darkness so that in his light all secrets and hidden evils are revealed. If we choose to live in the light of Jesus, all that is dark within our lives is revealed and nothing is hidden from him, or from the rest of the world. Grey becomes less grey and “right choices” vs. “wrong choices,” take on new meaning.

Light is as light does. What is it about light that makes it better than darkness? The obvious answer is that you can see light. Not only can you see light, but light also makes all things in its path visible so that you don't stumble into things. Light has a presence that makes it known to you. You can't miss light when it's around although you may not consciously think about it. But take it away, turn it off, cover it up, and you miss it immediately. Darkness, on the other hand, is the absence of light. Darkness is void of light.

When we think of it in those terms and believe that Jesus is the Light of the world, it is then we can say that Jesus is something you can see, while evil is hidden. Jesus makes everything else visible, while evil blocks things out. Evil is the absence of Jesus. Evil is void of everything that Jesus has come to represent to people.

Light is as light does. Light promotes growth. Darkness leads to death. There is a story of a woman who was working in her garden and came upon a large, green, healthy-looking squash plant, and she began to admire it. The stems appeared to be strong, and the leaves were large. She envisioned the beautiful squash that this plant would one day produce. Oh, that every plant in her garden could be as productive as this squash plant.

A few days later she noticed that the plant was terribly wilted. There were no signs of any damage, nor were any of the plants around it in this condition. She couldn't figure out what had happened and she tried to give it extra care to nurse it back to health. But in a couple more days, it was completely dead. She pulled the plant up and examined its roots. There she discovered that a bore worm, which could not be seen from the outside, had eaten the heart out of the stem of the plant.

That's how our dark, hidden sins work on us. Like the bore worm, hidden sins can eat away at the heart of our Christian experience and leave us spiritually dead. When left unexposed to the light, sin can run amok; obstructing our lives, destroying the true joy of life, and separating us from a loving God. The light of Jesus aides us in making the best choices we can make for our lives.

Light is as light does. A lighted path is easy to follow. We stumble in the darkness – “for once [we] were darkness.” Paul says in verse ten, “TRY to find out what is pleasing to the Lord.” I appreciate this truth because it reminds us of our imperfection and that maneuvering through lightness, greyness and darkness can be hard work for which we're likely to keep stumbling. But we try. We try to find the lighted path of Jesus and because we choose to walk as children of light, we can hopefully be the lighted path for others as well.

Is the path to our church, to the Christian life, well lit so that people can recognize it? As people come into our church, and into our lives, they are looking for family, companionship, love, support and acceptance.

People want to recognize the aisle that leads to the altar of God and they want to be recognized. They want to know God and they want to be known by God. People need to fit in and have a place among others. Like a lighthouse on the shores of the ocean, light can lead people to safe harbor or it can warn them of dangerous waters.

Are we a light that others can see in the darkness? Are we easily identifiable as a follower of Jesus so that people recognize our church as a safe place to be? Are we, as a congregation, a string of lights that shine out of this building and into our community? Can we lead people to the safety of Jesus and away from the dangers of sin?

Light is as light does. And light cannot help but to shine outward. You cannot hide your light under a bushel basket (Matt. 5:14-15) and expect it to be seen by others and attract attention. A light that is hidden is darkness and does not do anyone any good.

Light is as light does. And ultimately light will show the flaws and imperfections of all those around us. Our heroes get brought down, our highest government officials have a dark side, our best friends surprise us, and our parents are really human after all. And, oh, how we love to jump on the sins of others.

There was a young priest who was going to the confessional booth for the first time. He went with another priest, his senior. After a day of hearing confessions the older pastor offered some advice: "You know, I think that when a person finishes with a confession, you should say something on the order of, 'I agree it is terrible what you have done, and I would encourage you to stay away from that kind of behavior from now on ...' instead of saying, 'WOW. I can't believe you did that!' "

Paul tells us, "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" (5:12-13). Sins, those things that separate us from God, are revealed not to be talked about or to become the basis for gossip, not to be pitted one against another to show that I am less of a sinner than you, ----- but sins are revealed so that they might be forgiven and corrected. Sins are revealed so that what is done in the darkness might be overcome by what is done in the light. We are not to attack our fellow siblings for their sinfulness, but we are to caution them concerning the dangers of being drawn to the darkness.

Light is as light does. We are children of light who walk in the light. And while this passage tells us more about what life in the light is not than what life in the light is, like a parent pleading to his children, Paul challenges us to discover that for ourselves. "Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord," he says. We know that the light pleases God. So, if we live in the light of Jesus, we will reveal all those things that are pleasing to the Lord.

On the first Easter, God broke through the darkness once and for all. The darkness of the tomb of death was exposed when Jesus rolled away the stone. His light now shines throughout the world.

Light is as light does. You who are light ... be light. Do what light does. And you will no longer live in darkness.

AMEN