

The Scripture Reading

Ephesians 5:8-14

8 For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—

9 for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.

10 Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord.

11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

12 For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; 13 but everything exposed by the light becomes visible,

14 for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

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

The Message

WHAT WE DO - Wake Up!

Our Lenten EKKLESIA series is focusing on WHAT WE DO, as against what we think, or what we might like. Lent has always been about “what we do” to demonstrate our repentance, our turning from darkness (from a life of rebellion, sin, or maybe just going our own way) - to the light (to God’s way, the Way of Jesus, who is our light). That’s why we give up things, things that represent self indulgence, self seeking/serving, indifference to the things of God.

Tonight, we want to look at giving up DARKNESS, and all that goes with darkness, especially doing things that “are hidden and shameful,” and going through our days as if we were “asleep.”

Clark Strand, in his book “Bring On the Dark” writes about the history of bringing light to rural areas in the early 20th century, specifically, when electric light came to Woodstock, N. Y. He writes, ‘When the people of this small mountain town got their first dose of electrical lighting in late 1924, they were appalled. **‘Old people swore that reading or living by so fierce a light was impossible.’** That much light . . . **was an advertisement for the new, the rich and the beautiful** — a verdict against the old, the ordinary and the poor.”

Strand continues, **“In the modern world, petroleum may drive our engines but our consciousness is driven by light. And what it drives us to is excess, in every imaginable form.** Beginning in the late 19th century, the availability of cheap, effective lighting extended the range of waking human consciousness, effectively adding more hours onto the day — for work, for entertainment, for discovery, for consumption; for every activity except sleep, that nightly act of renunciation. **Darkness was the only power that has ever put the human agenda on hold.”**

“In centuries past, the hours of darkness were a time when no productive work could be done. Which is to say, **at night the human impulse to remake the world in our own image** — so that it served us, so that we could almost believe the world and its resources existed for us alone — was suspended. **The night was the natural corrective to that most persistent of all illusions: that human progress is the reason for the world.”**

Tonight’s text from Ephesians 5 forces us to consider the issues of ‘darkness and light’ in the context of our Lenten repentance. Our Lenten repentance forces us to face the truth, WE are NOT the reason for the World. Three questions, from the text, may help us -

- **What makes us “in the darkness?”**
- **What is the “fruit of the light?”**
- **What is Paul talking about - “shameful” “secret” things?**

What makes us “in the darkness”?

Genesis 1 tells “Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the face . . . And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” Proverbs 4 asserts,

“. . . The way of the wicked is deep darkness.” Isaiah 29 says that people in the darkness “. . . Go to great lengths to hide their work in darkness.” God brought light into the world. People preferred darkness and hiding (see Adam and Eve hiding from God after they disobeyed), and will go to great lengths to stay in the dark.

God, however, is determined to bring us into the light. John 1 proclaims that the creative power of God from the beginning, the Word, “. . . was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” So God’s remedy for darkness and hiding, for sin and concealing, is God’s light through the Word. And then John 1 declares, “The Word was made flesh” and that flesh made Word is Jesus.

Writing in Colossians 1, Paul reminds us that God “. . . has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.” John the Evangelist declares (in I John 4), “. . . God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”

So what makes us in the darkness is our refusal or failure to have a life saving relationship with God’s only Son, Jesus Christ, who is in himself the light of God and the Light of the World.

What is the “fruit of the light”?

If we are going to come out of darkness and into light through our relationship with Jesus Christ, as Savior and Lord, what will be the evidence? What can others see in us and about us that shows the change Jesus makes in our lives?

It might be helpful to understand what the evidence of darkness in our lives might look like. Peter writes in Second Peter 2, “. . . boastful words . . . lustful desires of the flesh . . . (People) who live in error . . . promising freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity.”

The evidence that we can present to an unbelieving world is not pretending to be perfect, to never make a mistake. The evidence of “fruit of the light” is repentance that bears fruit in GOODNESS, RIGHTEOUSNESS, and TRUTH (Ephesians 5). Fruit of Goodness - Godness - is “love, joy and peace.” This is what God bears as fruit in our souls, our minds, our lives. Fruit of Righteousness - not being perfect, but being on God’s side, doing what God has done in Christ - is “patience, kindness, goodness which is generosity.” It is treating people as God has treated us, with “patience and kindness and longsuffering’ (Romans 2). God has treated us with “patience, kindness and generosity” most directly in Jesus, and Jesus calls us to do likewise. And Fruit of Truth is “faithfulness which trusts God in all things, gentleness, and self-control.” You see in a life repentent, there is really no room for self reliance, self determination, for bowling over others and bullying others and demanding that others serve our purposes.

What is Paul talking about - “shameful” “secret” things?

Here’s where things get sticky, where people start saying Christians are meddling in their lives. People don’t want a list of the “deeds of darkness,” because, lets face it, we’ve ALL done these things - shameful and secret things. A wise counselor once told me “. . . Don’t do anything you’d be ashamed to tell your grandmother (she was a Godly woman - and gentle spirit) about. That same counselor said, “Don’t excuse yourself by calling it sin. If it bothers you, do something about it.” So what’s on the list?

Paul, in Romans 1, says, “. . . For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened . . . Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator . . . They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no

understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.” Did I leave ANY of us out? I don’t think so.

So what are we supposed to do - for Lent? Repent! Stop doing that which we know is against God - come out hiding, out of the darkness, out of the shameful and secret things. Start doing the things of God - things of Goodness, Righteousness, and Truth.

One last story.

Woodstock, N. Y., is not only known for resisting the electrification of rural America. This sleepy farm town in upstate New York is also known for one of the most totally depraved music festivals in the history of popular music - Woodstock Festival in the Summer of 1969. 1969, most often remembered as the summer of the Moon Landing, was also the Summer of the Manson Family and the Tate-Labianca murders, of the nationwide birth of ‘sex, drugs and rock and roll’ which Woodstock ushered in.

A little remembered person from that musical era was Jim Sullivan, a hard living rocker from California. 1969 was the year he scraped together enough money to set up a record label, and launch his first album, “U. F. O.” That album has become a cult album that has been recently re-released. Part of its allure is Jim Sullivan’s personal story.

Six years later, in 1975, the 35-year-old Sullivan disappeared in Santa Rosa, N.M. On the front seat of his recovered gray VW bug were his ID, his beloved 12-string Guild guitar, and a box of his two albums, “U.F.O.” and the 1972 LP “Jim Sullivan.” He was on his way from California to Nashville, TN, for a fresh start. He left behind his wife and son. And nothing has been heard from him since.

One of those who keeps the memory of Jim Sullivan alive, Al Dobbs (a small time actor and Hollywood cue-card holder), sums up the mystery, **“I think he stumbled into something or someone that was unforgiving,”** So here’s the problem with our persisting in staying in the darkness, taking comfort in the things of darkness,

maintaining our affection for and pursuit of people of the darkness, the darkness is that “something and someone that IS unforgiving.” If we persist in staying in the darkness, we will perish. Our only hope for life and joy and peace is coming into the light, coming into relationship with Jesus, coming “home” to God. As the text concludes,

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