**Ephesians 5:8-14** March 15, 2020

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Lent 3

 *Ephesians 5:8For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10and find out what pleases the Lord. 11Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. 12For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. 13But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: “Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

 Remember last week’s sermon? Remember about leading horses to water? One afternoon road-weary Jesus sat down at a well in hostile Samaritan territory. Along came this woman with a water pitcher and an attitude. After interrupting her day, Jesus gently led her to the water of life—Himself! As the realization of who he was dawned on her, she was so amazed that she abandoned her water pitcher (and her attitude) at the well. She ran back into town to tell everyone else. Minutes later, people were streaming out of town to see who this man was.

 This surely was a great day in this woman’s life. Wouldn’t it have been for you? But after Jesus stayed in Sychar for three days and moved on down the road, surely, she was left asking herself,

**“Now what?”**

 One can come to know his or her Savior, but then what?

 We believe God’s assurance that through faith in Christ the condemnation of our sins will not hound us beyond the grave. That’s then, but what about now?

 One can know that eternity waits. But between us and that blessed eternity is 10 or 50 or 80 years on this earth with its joys and tears. Now what?

 God’s answer to that question, “While I live in this world, what now?”, God’s answer is the first two sentences of our reading, (verse 8,) ***“You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.”***

 Now to be clear, the people this letter was written to had *not* grown up as Christians. They had grown up pagan. Before converting to Christianity, they may or may not have been nice people, but that didn’t matter, ***“You were once darkness.”*** They weren’t in darkness. They were darkness. They weren’t victims of “the problem.” They were “the problem.”

 ***“You were once darkness”*** was not only for the Ephesians. No matter how nice we are, we are sinful from birth, hostile to God, his enemies. God’s word is clear about this.

 Now maybe you grew up in a Christian home, never had rebellious years where you wandered far in alcohol or promiscuity. Maybe all you can remember is loving Jesus. But for you too, there was a time when you were the darkness. No one is born a Christian. But early on, in the waters of baptism, Jesus claimed you as his own. You were made, not chose to be, but made to be citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Awesome! But now what?

 Others of you were more like these Christians in Ephesus. You lived apart from Christ for much of your life. Then you heard about your Savior. Maybe the Holy Spirit worked on you like a chisel on a boulder, bit by bit. Maybe it was more like dynamite and you had a sudden “come to Jesus” moment. But if you have tasted the sweetness of Christ only later in life, you can really taste it. You can remember life without him, and now you know life with him. But now what?

 God’s answer: ***“Live as children of the light.”*** In our Wednesday evening services we sing, “Jesus is the light of the world” and the congregation responds, “The light no darkness can overcome.” As children of light, we resemble the Light, Jesus.

 Now almost every single other English translation says, “*Walk* as children of light” which is a little closer to the Greek. This version, the NIV, says ***“Live as children of the light.”*** Is that inaccurate? Here’s the problem: You can have a stay-at-home job where you never have to leave your desk. A delivery driver can drop meals at your door. Even groceries can be delivered. Endless entertainment can be had without ever getting up from the couch. Someone recently lamented on the internet: “I accidentally connected my Fitbit to Facebook and now everyone knows I only walked thirteen steps yesterday.” It’s almost possible! So, here’s my guess about this translation: in our day walking has become so optional, so *not* part of life, that the translators thought, “‘*Walk* as children of the light’ doesn’t mean much when people only walk 13 steps a day.” In Bible times, you had to walk to get groceries. If you wanted to see a friend, you walked. If you wanted to go to a sporting event or the theater, you walked. If you had moved away from home and wanted to visit your parents in another town, you didn’t get in a carriage or on a horse, you walked for a day or two.

 When just about anything you wanted to do in life required walking, ***“Walk as children of the light”*** meant something! ***“Live as children of the light”*** perhaps better reflects our reality. Every breath you take is a moment to reflect God’s light. Every day at work, every movie you watch, every diaper you change, every word you say, every text you send, ***“Live as children of the light.”*** Live it!

 Living it looks like this: ***“The fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth.”*** That’s what God’s people look like: goodness, righteousness and truth. Sounds boring, doesn’t it? And the younger you are, the more boring it sounds. (I’m not talking bad about young people. I think nearly all of us, when we were younger, had a greater fascination with the forbidden.) In goodness, righteousness and truth, there isn’t the thrill of doing something that you might get caught at. Few are the people who are going to notice you and say, “That is so cool!”

 One result of being a Christian is just plain old ***“goodness.”*** What comes to mind when someone says, “She is a good woman,” “He is a good man”? Perhaps not the most exciting person, but dependable. Maybe not the sort of person who throws good parties, but the sort of person you’d like on speed dial when you have a problem. Goodness consists in being a blessing to other people. At no time is goodness more needed, at no time does goodness shine more brightly, at no time is goodness more appreciated than times of trouble. Christians are made for adversity. We, on whom God has showered so much goodness, live for these times when we can bless others.

 The result of being a Christian is also ***“righteousness.”*** If goodness expresses our relationship with people, righteousness expresses our relationship with God. Christians are people concerned about doing what God wants. God said something, so we want to do it. In fact, if it isn’t what God wants, we stop it. That’s righteousness.

 The result of being a Christian is also ***“truth.”*** ***“Truth”*** means that Christians are truthful people. People can trust us even if they don’t agree with us because they know we don’t lie. Christians are so wed to the truth that we are willing to admit when we are wrong—even if it means the other guy scores points on us!

 But ***“truth”*** is more than bare facts. ***“Truth”*** is the foundation beneath the facts. This deep level truth tells us what to do with the facts. Coronavirus is a *fact* with a 4% mortality rate. Christians know the *truth* that they are God’s children, and that truth diminishes their fear of that fact. Truth leads them beyond simple self-preservation, beyond the question, “How can I survive?” to “How can I help other people survive?”

 Goodness, righteousness and truth are the result of belonging to Christ. Not, “They might be,” they are the result of belonging to Christ. The clear light of goodness, righteousness and truth shine through us.

 Take a moment to think of the other side. It is a sad day when many of our heroes are “dark” heroes. Think about the “dark” heroes you have seen in movies and books. These dark heroes frequently harbor a seething rage. They decide how they want to define right and wrong. They operate above the law. They reserve the right to carry out vengeance. Their faults are portrayed as “understandable” because they were once “victims.” When “dark” figures become our heroes, we set their qualities on the shelf next to goodness, righteousness and truth. Our light shines less brightly. We get light and dark mixed up as virtues in our minds.

 ***“Goodness, righteousness and truth;”*** these are the light, the aura, that surrounds Christians. People have many personality traits. Some are talkative, some very private. Some are courageous, others fearful. Some thoughtful, others quick to act. Christians come in all varieties. But ***“goodness, righteousness and truth”*** ought to be the hallmark of all, whatever their personality.

 As we live as children of the light, as we walk in the light, we are to (verse 10), ***“find out what pleases the Lord.”***

 We don’t just become Christians and do whatever we think God is “leading us to do.” Like the quality control people who put those little stickers in your new clothes and TVs and whatever else: “Quality control: #13” God would have us testing everything in our lives. We should be testing everything with these three questions: “Is this good for people? Is this right by God? Does this line up with Christian truth?” Goodness, righteousness, truth.

 When things do not line up with those three things, in our heart of hearts we know what to do. Verse eleven says, ***“Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.”*** Even as our sinful flesh tempts us, “No, it really won’t hurt you. Lots of Christians are doing the same thing,” we know the truth. These things are not good, they are not right, and they have no connection with real truth. We will be damaged by them. The world around us will be worse off.

 It is easy enough to have nothing to do with some bad things. Theft, dishonesty, pornography, sexual immorality in all its forms, hatred, “getting even,” these things we know to be wrong. Even if we should do them, a Christian’s conscience jumps out of its seat, waving red flags, “Danger! Danger!”

 But there are more difficult decisions to make, and perhaps none more difficult than entertainment. Entertainment once was a distant thing. And then there was radio and television. And now our source of entertainment is literally *never* out of arms reach. [Hold up cellphone.] This call for vigilance on the part of Christians. If we were to watch, read, and take part in only entertainment without a hint of sin anywhere in it, what would we watch? What would we read? This is a big subject, much bigger than I can tackle on my own or in these three minutes. But it is part of the self-diagnostic testing that children of God simply must be doing. Do these things lead me to sin, if not in deed, then in thought, in the way I speak? When a show portrays evil and sin, does it portray it as evil and sin, or as something attractive? Does this book I’m reading get its digs in on Christianity? I believe that all of us underestimate how much we are influenced by what comes in through our eyes and ears. I believe we forget how much our faith depends on God’s grace, and that we aren’t as strong as we think. If refusing to be part of what everyone else is part of, if it leaves you feeling a little naïve, does that matter? At some times, is ignorance not a virtue? Or do we prefer the praise of the godless to the commendation of our heavenly Father? How we must daily pray, “Lord, forgive me!”

 In that repentance, hear that sentence of the Lord, “Child, your sins are all forgiven.” When we are forgiven, now that God has claimed us as his, now that he has read to us the story of eternity, “Now what?”

 Walk out into that world. Be bold to be seen in prayer, pure in action, clean in talk, a light shining Christ’s light in this dark world. Amen.