

Ephesians 5:8-14 – Lent 4 – I Am the Light of the World – March 15, 2026

+In Nomine Iesu+

We walked the streets of Ephesus back in September. And it was amazing. If you see a contemporary picture of Ephesus, you will probably see the Library of Celsus. The façade still stands with four statues of women dedicated to Greek wisdom, virtue, knowledge, and intelligence. At one point, it held 12,000 scrolls. Ephesus was full of literature and art and architecture. I could have spent weeks at just this one site.

But in the first century, the Temple of Artemis was also there. It was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. There were religious shrines to the Emperor, calling all people to worship him first. Gladiators killed one another for entertainment. The city, in its day, was full of immorality and idolatry. And Paul instructs the Ephesian Church to walk as children of light in this dark place. Even though they lived in Ephesus, he wants them to be able to distinguish between light and darkness.

Paul writes the Epistle to the Church in Ephesus to make God's work among them clear. And to make this distinction. God is in the business of delivering us out of darkness and into the realm of His marvelous light. It all begins with His rescue—salvation by grace through faith. But His work continues right down into our lives—and into our souls.

The key verses are found back in Ephesians 2. You probably memorized them at one point. If you haven't, maybe this would be a beneficial Lenten discipline. And these verses must be held together.

Here, Paul says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Our reading today comes a little later. Chapter five. The theme of these later chapters in Ephesians is the integration of the Christian experience—Christian worship, theology, and ethics. These things belong together for us. Existence, thought, and action belong together. They must never be separated. What we are governs how we think. How we think determines, at least in part, how we act. We are what we habitually do.

In Christ, we are brought into the light—as a people He has formed for Himself. It is as Peter says in 1 Peter 2—one of my favorite verses, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

Followers of Christ are a people who have put off the old life—the old self—and put on the new. They have put off darkness, and put on light. This is God's work in this place. Again, this is regeneration—this is our new life in Christ. And in this reality, we are called to the daily renewal of our minds, by setting God's Word before our eyes.

We are called to remember how we "learned Christ...as the truth is in Jesus." Christ is our life. And we are to think Christianly about ourselves and our new status. Then, out of these ideas, we actively cultivate a Christian life.

The lectionary intends this reading to pair well with our Gospel reading in John 9 as Jesus says, "I am the Light of the World." In this context, He heals the blind man in

Jerusalem. And sets the Jewish leaders in an uproar. The light often does that. It exposes darkness. And the darkness reacts.

Our reading picks up this language. Paul says, “For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true).”

But here, we are coming into the middle of his conversation. This is often true of our readings. And it is okay. But let’s give our attention to the contexts from which our readings come. Earlier, in chapter five, we find a list of vices that are darkness according to Paul: sexual immorality, impurity, greed, obscenity, foolish talk, coarse joking. He talks about drunkenness just beyond our reading.

Paul makes it clear that when these things are our habits—when these things define us as individuals or as a community—we have no inheritance in the kingdom of God. We are living in the domain a darkness—a darkness from which God intends to deliver us.

His language is strong and rather frightening. These things bring the wrath of God. And the new way of life in Christ has no room for this kind of behavior. The Holy Spirit actually pushes these things out of our hearts and minds and lives.

Some people criticize Christianity, saying we are a little too critical on moral issues. Others just ignore what Christianity teaches when it comes to ethics. Even within the Church, some redefine Christianity as if the freedom we have in Christ frees us to live any way that we please. We rely on God’s forgiveness with no thought of changing our ways—with no desire for repentance. We want God and sin at the same time.

But Paul has no room for this kind of Christianity. If we return to 1 Peter 2, the Apostle Peter says it this way, “Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.”

Let’s remember that resisting the Holy Spirit is the sin that leads to spiritual death—the unforgivable sin. One of the works of the Holy Spirit is to convict us of sin, so that we turn to Christ for forgiveness and eternal life. But this turning always includes repentance—a change of mind regarding our sin.

The Apostle John says it this way in 1 John 3, “No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”

And so, Paul says here in our reading, “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.” But what if we looked at all of this a little more positively? If things like sexual promiscuity, the abuse of alcohol, and crass and unkind language don’t define us—if the Holy Spirit pushes these things out of our lives—what are we going to talk about? What will our lives look like?

Or as Peter classically asks, “Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness?” Of course he answers his own question.

For Paul, the bottom line of this discussion is: Christians are to live in God's light in the midst of the world's darkness. Christians are to be a source of light. And this is the nature of the Holy Spirit's presence with us.

Jesus says in John 8—much like he says in John 9, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

And again, Paul says here in our reading, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.”

The most important thing about this statement is Paul doesn't merely suggest that before their conversions, Christians were in darkness and now they are in the light—though that is all true. But he says something still more profound.

Before, they *were* darkness. Now, they *are* light. He is pointing to a change in them—a change in us. And this is not just a change of environment. Christianity should not be reduced to a bubble in which we hide away from the world. Instead, we are called to a new status in the world. We should be able to walk through the streets of Ephesus—all while being citizens of a heavenly kingdom—living by the dictates of that kingdom.

We are saved unto a Christian life full of true life and light. And this life flavors our world with the life that we have in Christ. Light broke into our world in Jesus Christ—it breaks into our lives through the Word and Sacraments.

This is what it means to be full of the Holy Spirit. And it will just come busting out of us. When we are full of the light of Christ, when we are full of the Holy Spirit—there will be moments when God's Word and wisdom simply come bursting through in our words and lives. This certainly happens on Sunday morning in Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. But it happens in our private lives and families as well.

So, Paul builds a picture of the Christian life in the light that Christ brings to us. And his perspective on the Christian life involves what we are, how we think, and the way we act. We are God's new society, His new family, bathed in light in Holy Baptism, a people who have put off the old life and put on the new.

Paul tells us more. After he tells us to walk as children of the light, we get a little comment in parentheses. “Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true).”

The fruit of light, that which results from the light-character, the Holy Spirit character of Christians, consists in all goodness, truth, and beauty. These things fill our mouths and minds and dreams. These things define our conversations and shape our lives.

We ask the questions of each conversation—of each action—of each decision: Is it good? Is it right? Is it true? Our lives are to be full of clarity and content and order and reverence and wisdom—just like our worship services. This is the basis of my challenge for the congregation during Lent. This is the purpose of prayer, and fasting, and time in God's Word. We are disciplining our lives—to avoid evil—and to embrace Christ.

Really, what I am directing us to do is found in Psalm 119, “How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”

This, of course, isn't just for young men. Christians are to examine carefully and exactly what is pleasing to the Lord to whom we belong. In all of our life experiences, we are to step back and give serious thought to what pleases or displeases Christ in our lives. We care about the will of God. We orient our lives toward Him. We can distinguish between light and darkness. And we don't indulge the darkness. We are not our own.

Now, I know we touched on a few issues today. Light and darkness. Alcohol. Language. The worship service. The filling of the Holy Spirit. Christian ethics. But, of all the things the Holy Spirit does, He will always point us to Jesus Christ. He points the world to Him. Jesus Christ is the light of the world. And through the Spirit, we are children of that light regardless of where we live—Ephesus, or Clinton, or wherever the Lord places us.

And in Christ by grace through faith—and in lives led in the light—let's deliberately radiate that light into our world. We walk as children of light in all that is good and right and true. Let's give our attention to Him with disciplined lives—repentance, prayer, fasting, selflessness, holiness, and purity. Let's have God's Word echoing in our lives and souls. Let's be who we are. "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." In the name of Jesus. Amen.

+Soli Deo Gloria+