

Sermon #1,254: Ephesians 5:1-9 (Historic Epistle)  
3-19-17, Lent 3, Bethany-Princeton MN  
(Hymns 236, 250, 425; comm. 49, 259, 593)

## WALK IN THE LIGHT THAT GOD'S TRUTH GIVES

Prayer: I bind to myself today: the power of God to guide me, the wisdom of God to teach me, the eye of God to watch over me, the ear of God to hear me, the word of God to give me speech, the hand of God to protect me, the way of God to go before me, the shield of God to shelter me, the host of God to defend me, against the snares of demons, against the temptations of vices, against the lusts of nature, against everyone who meditates injury to me, whether far or near, with few or with many. Amen. (*St. Patrick's Breastplate*)

**The Text, Ephesians 5:1-9 (v. 8-9).** <sup>8</sup> For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light <sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of the light is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth). Lord, this is Your Word and these are Your words. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ, who is the Light of the world:

**“You were once darkness”** is not saying that it is all in the past and there is no danger of slipping back into it. Likewise, **“now you are light in the Lord”** is not saying you have nothing to worry about, “once in the light-always in the light,” and it’s all merry and bright.

Christianity is not a naïve religion. To the contrary, **“walk as children of light”** is exhorting, pleading with Christians to stay in the light. God’s apostle is recommending a determined way of thinking precisely because in this life the danger – the darkness – is always there.

We are hearing these words on the Sunday in Lent that confronts us with the demon host, the devil and all the devils who are very active. Jesus here calls them **“unclean spirits,”** the opposite of cleanness and brightness. They are the opposite of God’s good angels who dwell in light and glory. They dwell in the darkness and work in the shadows.

People want to know if there is still demon possession. The devils are certainly active. The devil is the source of all sin and evil. But we live in

an age that can't say what evil is. Better than looking for examples of demon possession is knowing what evil is and being aware of darkness. One of the best expressions of this in our time is in the writings of J.R.R. Tolkien, in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* and some other writings. In these works the evil villain is known as "*the Dark Lord*," those who are seduced by him are said to "*fall into shadow*," and the elves especially who come from Valinor, "*the Undying Land*," have the light of Valinor that they're always trying to hold onto; it can repel the darkness in powerful ways. You'll see how this reflects the Bible's teaching.

So the apostle writes: "**You were once darkness.**" This refers to our condition at birth, that everyone is born sinful, with a sinful nature. A major part of this is that we are born spiritually blind. Along these lines, St. Paul speaks elsewhere about "*those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ should shine on them*" (2Co 4:3-4).

This is our natural condition. In the sacrament of baptism, one thing that happens is that the darkness is dispelled. The child who is born in the darkness of sin, unbelief, and held captive in this darkness by the devil, is given the pure clear light of faith by God. This is why, in ancient times, Baptism was called "the illumination" or "the enlightening." In Baptism we become "**children of light.**" More precisely, children of the Light.

What is the Light? The Light is eternal. The Light is Jesus Christ. The Light is also the Truth. He is the Truth. He is opposed to the prince of darkness, Satan, who is a liar. The Light is greater. Christ is greater. But the prince of darkness is the prince of this world in which we live. So the natural atmosphere of this world is darkness. Also we still have a sinful nature which is always drawn toward this darkness. One of the great deceptions is that the world calls "enlightened" what is really darkness, and it calls "blind superstition" whatever follows the only true Light.

So Scripture everywhere tells us what is most essential: to walk in the light. This earthly life is pictured as a journey, and the Lord as your unseen guide. "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths*" (Pr 3:6). This is so essential for you young people, Carrie and Ben who will be confirmed soon, also all our young adults. You

can be *misled* to lean on your own understanding or the understanding of the worldly wise. They worship the mind. But it's a *sin-darkened* mind.

In these verses of Ephesians 5, and also the end of Ephesians 4 that precedes this, St. Paul addresses the darkness of sin. He mentions the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment sins of "**fornication,**" which is any sexual activity outside of marriage, and also "**filthiness, foolish talking, and coarse jesting**" which fall under this commandment too. He mentions the sin of coveting, which is connected to the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment when people use lack-of-money excuses for living together outside marriage, or when a woman marries a man she shouldn't marry, or who is not of the same faith, because she's afraid of being alone and wants financial security. If you add the end of chapter 4, St. Paul also says to "*put away lying,*" to "*let him who stole steal no longer,*" and: "*Do not let the sun go down on your wrath ... Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.*"

With all these sins – which are against the neighbor – we are experts at excusing them, and finding fault instead of confessing our sins. You told a little lie to keep from causing hurt. Cut corners on taxes if you can get away with it. Someone provoked you to anger. You have good reason to feel resentment because someone disrespected you.

But what happens here is that the devil gains a foothold. The darkness overtakes us. All of this thinking does not come from God. It comes from our reason, the sin-darkened mind. That's how we have to think of it.

You have to admit that this happens not just to others but to you. Then you experience the darkness of guilt and shame, or the darkness of sorrow and grief, or the darkness of discouragement and depression. This is the devil's true goal. He wants you to dwell and stay in this darkness.

We would like to ignore this reality. That is natural – as in our sinful nature. Jesus said to Nicodemus: "*This is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world*" – He is speaking of Himself – "*and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed*" (Jn 3:19-20). We nod our heads in thinking of others. But harder to admit that we don't want this exposed.

However, think of it this way: It is Jesus who is the Light! Why does He want to expose our sins? Not to punish us but to save and help us! He came down from heaven to take all our sins upon Himself, to let our darkness swallow Him up in the tomb, but to rise the third day to walk in newness of life and light and glory, so that we can walk with Him, not abiding in darkness but with Him in His light and glory.

So the good news – the Gospel – is that although this is a battle that we are often losing, actually we have all that we need to win this battle. *Though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us in this darkness, we tremble not, we fear no ill, they shall not overpower us.* Why? We have Christ. He is the Light. He is the Champion in this battle. We tend to think that the light is just there. But actually it does things; He does things. So in Tolkien's writing, as I told you, the light can be held in a clear vessel and used to hold back the darkness. So too Christ as the Light goes on the offensive. Only He can expose Satan and dispel the darkness that the old evil foe brings.

Where does Jesus' light shine upon our sins? In His Word. So when we hear, "**walk as children of light,**" it means walking in the light that His Truth gives. It is walking in the light of His Word. His Word is our offensive weapon in this struggle against evil.

You know the psalm verse, "*Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*" This verse can only be understood in Jesus. He is the Light for our path. The path is the trail He has blazed, in which He leads His followers – His children – to the cross. "*Your Word*" that lights up the right path is very specific. It's the Gospel, forgiveness of your sins. It's the only thing that dispels the darkness of sin and Satan.

The Gospel is a weapon we use when we answer Satan's accusations with the promise of God that we are His children – children of the Light – because Jesus is our Savior. "*One little word can fell*" the devil – the name of Jesus and His word of forgiveness. This is the brightest light in this world! It is the light of forgiveness, the light in which no sin dwells.

The truth of the forgiveness of your sins is the brightest light, your true glory. You shine like the sun because of this, as you will in heaven. The angels in heaven rejoice over your forgiveness, Jesus says. So the voice of

the Gospel has the light of heaven in it. When it comes to you, and it shines on you and removes sin and turns Satan's accusations into lies, then you are dwelling in God's brightness. His Word – the true light – produces the pure clear light of faith in you to believe this is your reality.

Knowing what evil is, being aware of the darkness, is easier when you actually dwell in the light of His truth. Knowing false doctrine, recognizing error, is easier when you are being exposed to the light of His Word – when falsehood is brought up against the light to be seen for what it is.

So parents, if you want your children to dwell in the light; young people, if you don't want to be seduced by the wicked spirit of this present age, and everybody who is constantly attacked by the forces that desensitize us to the devil's deceptions, the best thing to do is to dwell in the light of God's Word – which means constantly hearing God's words so that they form your reality and what you delight in. It shows the darkness of Satan to be what it really is. The worst darkness, once again, concerns the devil accusing you in your conscience and making you unsure of God. Christ, who is the Truth, and the Light, has forgiveness for you. Stay in that light, hear constantly that Christ forgives you, and in your home forgive each other and fill it with the light of God's forgiveness in Christ.

In verse 9 we hear that it is actually “the fruit of the light” – the direct result of dwelling in the light – that we walk **“in all goodness, righteousness, and truth.”** So if you want to walk in Jesus' footsteps, follow Him in your faith and also in how you live, to avoid evil, not go down the wrong path, resist the things God doesn't want you to do, make the right friends, marry the right person, do good work, make good choices, fill your life with things that are good, right, true, pure, and lovely, and feel good about what you're doing and how you're living, this is all the **“fruit of the light.”** You hear His Word, in which He does all the work and you get all the good results. Walk in the light that He gives! Amen!