

“Walking as Children of the Light”

Ephesians 5: 8 – 14

John 9: 1 – 7

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It's common knowledge that light is crucial for growing crops, for growing that which bears fruit. Not much grows in the dark. Since becoming an urban chicken keeper, I've learned something else. Hens don't lay eggs in the winter because it's cold but because they need a certain amount of daylight to get their inner egg producing mechanisms to work. We could put out an artificial light in the coup but would rather just let nature run its course, giving the poor girls a winter's break. Light is crucial for growth in gardening and egg production.

As we turn to our Lenten theme using gardening as a metaphor, as we turn to 'soul gardening', we also know that light is just as important for spiritual growth and bearing fruit. Before jumping into spiritual growth, into soul gardening, let's take a more general look.

Darkness and light are favorite metaphors for good and evil. Think about some of the more popular movies:

You Star Wars fans, you remember Darth Vader preying on Luke Skywalker saying, “Give yourself over to the Dark side.” And in J.R. Tolkin's Lord of the Rings, one of my favorite quotes from Samwise, “It's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo. The ones that really mattered, full of darkness and danger, they were. Sometimes you didn't want to know the end, because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was when there's so much bad that had happened? But in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow. Even darkness must pass.” We may want to hold on to these words of Samwise in this time in which we find ourselves, those Easter words of hope that ‘even darkness must pass.’

Darkness and light, metaphors found all through history and religions and our scriptures, beginning with the very first page of Genesis; ‘In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good.”

Two scriptures read on Christmas Eve, words of the beginning of *our* faith story as followers tried to put on paper what the presence of Jesus in the world and in their lives meant and means to us today:

Words from the prophet Isaiah: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness- on them light has shined.”

And from the gospel of John: “In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and

the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

As Christians, we speak of Jesus as the light of the world, the one whose way takes us from darkness to light and...from a physical form of darkness - blindness - to seeing.

There once was a man who had been blind from birth. Someone had to have been at fault, had to have sinned, or so the culture of that time believed. And so, as the disciples and Jesus walked by the man, they asked him, “Who sinned, the man or his parents?” To which Jesus gives an answer which pays no mind to the cultural assumption. He answers, “Neither. Instead, God is working through this man’s blindness to show all that I am the light of the world.” And while the disciples were still standing there scratching their heads in confusion, Jesus bent down and did a very unsanitary thing (don’t try this at home, kids). He spits on the ground, mixed the dirt and saliva together to form a paste and smeared it over the blind man’s eyes and hearers of this text, both then and now, have the same response of “Ewww!”. Jesus then gave him instructions to wash and when the blind man returned, he could see.

This is the point where we ended the reading today but the story goes on for some length. Neighbors don’t recognize him, Pharisees argue about whether or not Jesus ‘sinned’ by performing a miracle on the Sabbath, the blind man’s parents, when asked how their son was healed, don’t want to get involved. It’s a story that leaves many of us back in the very first part, scratching our heads and asking, “Wow, how did he do that?” when the story is really trying to answer another question, “Who is this Jesus?” The answer is; the one who brings light to the darkness and sight to the blind. In this season of Lent, we are reminded that for those of us who walk the Christian path, he is the one who shows us the way; who invites us to turn toward a life that is God centered which is other centered which is not self centered.

We are invited, both in the song that we will sing and the scripture that was read, to “live our life as children of light”.

Live as children of light, not children of darkness. What does that look like for you? Something about a life that is about what is pleasing to the Lord. We know from gospel stories that Jesus stands by the downtrodden, welcomes the children, turns away from religious laws of judge mentalism, reaching out in compassion to those on the margins, preaches of a God of unconditional love where circles are drawn so wide that no one is left out, preaches against the curse of money when it becomes that which is worshiped in our lives.

You see, when we turn toward the way of Jesus, when we turn toward the light, something happens...or at least it does if we are receptive to the light. That ‘something’ is that we are not only onlookers but we become witnesses to that Light, it’s a light that grows God’s seeds of love and compassion within us not to just share but to shine out the darknesses that we encounter. For all of it’s risks, exposing darkness is part of the practice of living as children of the light.

Sometimes it’s just our actions of kindness and compassion that make people around us take notice, shedding light on their unkind ways. Or perhaps it’s more ‘glaring’; speaking truth to

power as a way of exposing darkness, standing for someone by standing against injustices or darkness that we see.

There seems to be quite a bit of darkness, I'm not sure any more than before but perhaps more noticeable. The other evening while I was watching the news, words scrolled across the screen that if we stay this course that we are on, by the year 2050 90% of the coral reefs will be gone. Meaning the small fish that feed there will die which mean the fish that feed on them will die and so on and we really don't know the vastness of problems that happen when an ecosystem is destroyed, do we? Another terrorist strikes, this time in England, killing and wounding many. Our political party system seems so broken that nothing can fix it while at the same time hints to become stronger each day to Russian involvement and collusion into our political process.

As followers of the Light with a capital L, we try as best we are able to shine out these darkneses. We gather bottle caps to make a bench to rest on, we recycle, we call our legislators, we pray, we denounce any form of hatred or bigotry, we use our resources to help some of the most vulnerable in our city.

We as a people of faith hold onto the Light of our faith. It's a light that helps us to see that which is true, which is good, which is pleasing to God. It's a light that exposes the darkness around us, helps us to see the path more clearly.

So, this week's Lenten task: reflect on the light of Christ in your lives. How have you at one time been like the blind man, with no clue but now you see? Can you see that new growth in your life as a result of embracing the message of the Light of the world who came to tell us of a loving God? And how can you, as children of light, give that sight to others and to the world, how are you called to 'shine out the darkness'?

Amen