

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Lent 3
March 15, 2020
Sermon by Pastor Daniel Pautz
Keep your lights on
— Ephesians 5:8-14

This sermon was written before all the corona virus actions were put into effect in our nation. Yet we live as children of light in all situations.

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. 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. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for 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.”

Maybe this has happened to all you who are drivers. It has happened to me several times. Here is an example. I was turning from a side street by my house onto a very busy street. It was early evening. I waited for the traffic to go by. I checked again – looked right and left – and was about to make the turn when literally at the last second and by God’s grace I spotted a car coming without its lights on. I was able to stop. Not only did I breathe a sigh of relief but also I think my car did. Light is very important.

The Bible uses the picture of light quite often. Sometimes it is used to refer to the Bible. “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” (Psalm 119:105) Often Light refers to our Lord. Psalm 27:1 says, “The Lord is my Light and my Salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the Strength of my Life. Of whom shall I be afraid?” Jesus Himself says, “I am the Light of the world.” Three weeks ago Pastor Gran preached a wonderful sermon on the words of Jesus, “You are the Light of the World.” Paul’s words to the Ephesians are, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.” Do you have your lights on? Do you really? Are you driving down the highway of life without your lights on? If they are on, are they on bright or dim? Fellow Believers, Keep your lights on.

The Holy Spirit has enlightened you. When you were brought to faith in Jesus – and for most of us that was at our baptism – you became light. You are not darkness. All unbelievers are darkness. But the Holy Spirit brought you faith and enlightened you with His gifts. All the wonderful things that Jesus did for you by His perfect life and by His innocent sufferings and death on that Good Friday are yours. It is not the case that you a Christian should be light – You are light. Now the Lord through the Apostle Paul’s letter directs you, Live as children of light. Keep those lights on.

Do you know for what purposes the Lord died for you and rose victorious? It is not only so that when you die, you will go to heaven but also – and this is a very important – but also so that as long as you live, you serve Him. You see, we are not left here on earth to twiddle our spiritual thumbs and await the big event of when the Lord takes you or when He returns. You have been blessed by God to be a blessing. Here is a good three word motto or purpose statement of your life – Saved to Serve. Being forgiven of all your sins by Jesus is not a license to sin all the more. It is the motivation to **Live as children of light**.

How do we live as children of light? You don’t have to wear a shirt that lights up and says, “I am a Christian.” “I am a follower of Jesus.” Just be the kind of person God wants you to be in your everyday life. Seek to please Him. Paul uses the illustration of fruit to describe living as children of light. As a grapefruit tree produces grapefruit, here is the fruit that a child of light produces. “For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth.” Another listing with which we might be more familiar is: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23)

Then Paul adds the thought, “**Find out what pleases the Lord.**” You know what pleases God. It is not guesswork. God clearly tells us. A summary of what pleases Him is your obedience to the Ten Commandments. Many of you know the commandments very well. For example, if I would ask you what is the Seventh Commandment, I am sure many of you would say, “You shall not steal.” Or what is the Eighth Commandment about, many would say it is about speaking the truth and not lying. Keep your lights on by obeying God’s commandments.

Some people dislike the commandments. There are more than a few who don’t want anyone to tell them what to do and how to live. Some have become agnostics and atheists and in essence say as the Pharaoh of Egypt

defiantly said to Moses, "Who is the Lord that I should obey Him?" (Exodus 5:2) But unless they change their beliefs there will come a time when they will obey God when He says on the Last Day, "Depart from me into everlasting condemnation." (Matthew 25:41)

Others without realizing it think of God's commandments as a buffet. When you go to a restaurant buffet, you pick and choose what food you want and what you do not want. So some choose which commands to try to keep and which ones to disregard. Maybe some would not dream of physically harming another but don't give a second thought about being dishonest. Christians, don't turn off your lights concerning a particular command because God expects us to obey them all.

Why do we obey God and live as children of light? It is not because we are trying to earn our salvation because that is impossible. It would be easier for a ladybug to send out an email than for a person to earn salvation, easier for a chipmunk to pilot a jet plane than for us to merit going to heaven. We obey and live as children of light for several reasons. One is that God has every right to tell us what to do. It is our DUTY to obey. These are not the Ten Suggestions but the Ten Commandments. He is the Creator, we are the creatures. He is the boss, we are the servants. But what really motivates us in God's love for us, and in turn, your love for God. Jesus says to His followers, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." (John 14:15) Notice that His words are not If you love me, you must obey what I command – but it is a statement of fact. You will obey what I command. And then there is another similar passage in 1 John 5:3 This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome. Keep your lights on at work, in school, shopping, wherever you are. Just live the Christian life.

Right now in the situations caused by corona virus is a time when we are especially called upon to keep our lights on. That means in the midst of all difficulties we still trust our Lord. We remember that He still remains in charge and will take care of us. We know what Psalm 46 says, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in time of trouble." Yes, we are to take the necessary precautions in connection with the virus. We are to listen to the medical people. We are to pay attention to our leaders. But having done those things, we are not to worry. 1 Peter 5:7 says, "Cast all your anxiety upon God for he cares for you." God is not the cause of illnesses in this world. Sickneses and problems happened only after mankind fell into sin. But God can make use of difficulties for His purpose and for the benefit of His children. There is the tendency even among us to rely upon self and our finances and our ingenuity more than upon God. It is easy to place lesser things as being more important than God and His gifts of forgiveness and life everlasting. Keep in mind also Romans 8:28 which tells us that all things work together for the good of them that love God. My brother from Green Bay had a wonderful thought that every child of God does have. He said that if he would contact the virus and become ill, having taken the proper precautions, and even would die from it, he through Jesus would be going to heaven. He is keeping the lights on. Also pray. The Lord says, "Call upon me in the day of trouble." (Psalm 50:15) How about you? Do you keep those lights on? Do you put them on dim? Or do you even turn them off? How about at sporting contests? Do you explode in anger at bad calls? Do you cuss and swear? Do you ridicule opposing players? What about when you are in the company of unbelievers? Do you turn off that light? Do you join the darkness of the unbeliever? You don't have to shine the bright light in the face of each person you meet. But keep the light on. As an illustration I will tell you about four of my young grandchildren at our Lutheran School who usually after school on Wednesdays stay in our home until their parents can pick them up. They have a fascination with these small but bright flashlights – and often would take them home until we said "No more". One of the things they did at first until we made a rule is that they would shine these bright lights in the eyes of us and one another. Being a child of light does not mean you have to continually shine the bright light into the eyes of the unbeliever every time you meet that person. But it does mean that you are not to turn off your light!

A young Christian man was enrolled in a university several hundreds of miles away from home and lived in a dormitory. His parents were concerned whether he was being given a hard time or bullied because of his Christian beliefs. When he was home on a school break, his parents asked him about it. His reply was, "Don't worry about it, Mom, Dad. Nobody has given me any grief because they don't even know that I am a Christian." Obviously, if this young man did not give any evidence that he was a follower of Jesus, he was not keeping his light on but also he was in danger of falling away from Jesus. By keeping your light on, you might be leading others to Jesus. Don't let unbelievers lead you astray.

Keep your lights on every day. A young man certainly had his lights on as he invited his girlfriend to attend his Lutheran church with him. What amazed her was that the Bible was used in readings and in the sermon, something we tend to take for granted. She had never read the Bible. Here is what followed next. The two of them started reading the Bible together. They continued to date, they married, they have celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary, and they are in our church every Sunday. And they keep their lights on.

A person with a bright flashlight person went into an old house at night and flipped on the lights. It exposed all kinds of bugs and creepy things. Some of you might have a special flashlight that at night will reveal scorpions.

When we let our light shine, it will reveal evil and sins and shameful things. "Turn off that light, someone might shout." And that one shouting might not only be an unbeliever but yourself as you become aware of your own sins. But instead of turning off the light, go to the one who removes sin, the Lord Jesus Christ. And at the same time He recharges the batteries of light so that they burn brightly and continually. Never be ashamed of Jesus.

Ashamed of Jesus, that dear Friend
On whom my hopes of heaven depend?
No; when I blush, be this my shame,
That I no more revere His name.

Ashamed of Jesus? Yes, I may
When I've no guilt to wash away,
No tear to wipe, no joy to crave,
No fears to quell, no soul to save.

Till then--nor is my boasting vain—
Till then I boast a Savior slain.
And oh, may this my portion be,
That Christ is not ashamed of me!