

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Ephesians 5:8-14

You groped your way through that murk once, but no longer. You're out in the open now. The bright light of Christ makes your way plain. So no more stumbling around. Get on with it! The good, the right, the true—these are the actions appropriate for daylight hours. Figure out what will please Christ, and then do it.

Don't waste your time on useless work, mere busywork, the barren pursuits of darkness. Expose these things for the sham they are. It's a scandal when people waste their lives on things they must do in the darkness where no one will see. Rip the cover off those frauds and see how attractive they look in the light of Christ.

Wake up from your sleep,

Climb out of your coffins;

Christ will show you the light!

So watch your step. Use your head. Make the most of every chance you get. These are desperate times!

Where did I see God this week? I saw and felt God's hand moving me as I worked on my plans for today's service. It began Monday, which is most often the day I plan Sunday's services. In the March newsletter, I reported that I would be preaching on Psalm 23, which was one of the lectionary texts. I decided to read a summary on the text from one of my preaching annuals to get the creative juices flowing for planning the service.

That's when I began to feel God tugging at my heart. I never got to the summary on the Psalm 23 text. Instead, I found myself reading the summary on one of the other lectionary texts—the one from Ephesians, which you heard Lisa read to you this morning. I felt this need then to change my focus from the Psalm text to the Ephesians text. It was not a feeling that I could dismiss, so I did it. There is more that happened during the week that fueled my focus for this sermon. I will say more about that later.

Let me share with you the opening story in the summary of this text from the book, *The Preaching Annual, 2005 Edition*. The writer says, "One of my least favorite creatures in God's creation is a cockroach. I don't like to look at them, step on them, or hear them scurrying across the floor. We seldom see cockroaches during the day because they don't like the light. They live and do most of the things cockroaches like to do at night. On occasion, I have walked into a room, turned on a light, and seen a cockroach scurrying for a dark crevice to hide."

In today's passage, Paul encourages his friends in Ephesus to expose the deeds of the disobedient. What does Paul mean by this? How should we expose those who are walking in darkness? Should we turn a light on them just like a cockroach in a dark room? Or is there a better way?" This was what I read as I began to feel the inner stirrings of my thoughts for today.

Paul wrote this letter, likely while he was in prison, and sent it with a messenger, Tychicus, from the church in Ephesus to that church in Ephesus. He did not write the letter to address any heresy or problem. It actually was written to encourage the church. Paul served at the church for three years. As a result he was very close to them. It was a sad day for both when Paul felt led to move on to the next place where God needed him to serve. Because the letter does not contain any specific references to any people or any problems in the Ephesian church, it is thought that it might be a letter Paul wrote to be circulated among other churches too.

A common theme we find in several of Paul's letters, as well as in this one, is unity among the body and commitment to the use of individual gifts through the work of the church. He encourages everyone in the church to live by the highest moral standards, as defined by God's law and further defined through Christ's teachings.

Paul reminded them that they too, once lived in darkness. They were Gentiles without knowledge of Christ but have been saved and now walk with Christ. He goes on to say to them in verse 10 to always resist all fruitless work that leads to sin. Sin survives and creates havoc in the realm of ignorance and rejection of Christ. Sin tries to hide itself, like a cockroach, under the cover of darkness.

Paul acknowledges, what was probably obvious and trying to the church, that they were living in dark times. He encourages them, therefore, to be instruments of light amidst the darkness, and in doing so, the light exposes the sin of darkness. As we all know, when one wants to enter a dark room, we usually reach for a light so we can see where we are going and so that we don't trip over things that are in the room. Likewise, a Christian, filled with the light of Christ shines into the darkness of sin and exposes the bad or evil deeds one might participate in, hopefully then bringing about change. I think most of us understand this concept.

But there's more to what Paul shared. He shares a quote from the prophet Isaiah, found in Isaiah 60:1. The prophet was speaking to the people in Jerusalem. He said to them, "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead." The prophet Isaiah urges the people to wake up from the night to let its light shine before the nations because God's glory was with them. They had been asleep by not wholeheartedly honoring God with their lives. Paul was urging those in Ephesus to be aware of the sleepy and dark condition into which they were slipping.

The text invites us to think about our walk with Jesus, and he asks us to exam our lives to see whether we have slipped into living our lives half-asleep. We have our daily routines. We get up, eat breakfast, some go to work, while others complete household chores, volunteer work or keeping appointments. We watch television, maybe read the paper or check Facebook or surf the internet. We have all these things that we do, day-in and day-out. During the everyday monotonous routines of life, we may not be living in darkness, but then, we may not be living in the light either. We may be half-asleep and missing out on the joy of letting our light shine for others to see.

Here's where I get to the part when I tell you my other God-moment. Don and I were invited to go see the movie, "Jesus Revolution." I know some of you have already seen the movie, and you, in fact, encouraged me to go see it because you thought it was good. So did I.

For those who do not know anything about the movie, the following is a description of the movie I found online: "JESUS REVOLUTION is the story of one young hippie's quest in the 1970s for belonging and liberation that leads not only to peace, love, and rock and roll, but that sets into motion a new counterculture crusade—a Jesus Movement—changing the course of history. Inspired by a true movement, JESUS REVOLUTION tells the story of a young Greg Laurie (played by Joel Courtney) being raised by his struggling mother, in the 1970s. Laurie and a sea of young people descend on sunny Southern California to redefine truth through all means of liberation. Inadvertently, Laurie meets Lonnie Frisbee (played by Jonathan Roumie), a charismatic hippie-street-preacher, and Pastor Chuck Smith (played by Kelsey Grammer) who have thrown open the doors of Smith's languishing church to a stream of wandering youth. What unfolds becomes the greatest spiritual awakening in American history. Rock and roll, newfound love, and a twist of faith lead to a JESUS REVOLUTION that turns one counterculture movement into a revival that changes the world."

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The movie connected me to my days of being an eighth grader, caught up in this movement, although I wasn't a hippie, nor did I know the magnitude of the movement at that time. I remember my young girlfriends and I being really "on-fire" for Jesus. Yup, we were "Jesus freaks." I remember carrying my bible, which was not pocket-size, to school everyday. My friends and I read our bibles together and sought to understand it as we talked about it, much like we are doing in the Contemporary Christian Conversations class right now. I remember having no inhibitions about talking about Jesus.

I remember our parents taking turns to drive my friends and me occasionally on a Friday evening to attend a charismatic worship service at *Teen Challenge* in Rehrersburg, PA which was not exactly out the back door to Lititz. *Teen Challenge* is a Christian drug and alcohol rehab facility for men. I remember it being an amazing experience. I look back on those days, recognizing the energy and dedication I had in my faith walk. I look back and think how simple it was then.

I was aware that lives were being changed. I got to see that in the lives of the men with addictions at Teen Challenge. But I saw it up close and personal through the life of a girl in our group who was going down a dark path of addictions and active sexuality, already at her young age. It all came to a screeching halt for her when she met Jesus.

I confess that I walked away from the movie the other day, feeling a void, with a longing for the energy and passion for Jesus to rise again in our nation, our world, in our churches. I found myself thinking about today's text from Ephesians and sensing the **rising movement of half-asleep** Christians.

The rise of the Jesus movement came out of a longing for meaning, purpose, and acceptance in life. People turned to drugs, sex and alcohol, only to find that was a nightmare. But when the light of Jesus reached them, they were changed.

There are people still today who turn to these addictions, but some also, I believe, are turning to technology to find comrades that stand with them to support them in their evil ventures, to find acceptance for their misguided beliefs, to find attention from others that fills a void within them. People are being misled and used in some instances. Some are finding meaningless moments of satisfaction that fade and let them feel emptier than before. And, we know a lot about a whole host of other avenues where darkness makes its mark and scars people.

As I reflected on these things, I agonized over Paul's message to wake up and let our light shine. What would the world look like if more Christians stopped sleepwalking through life? What would the world look like if all of our lights were turned on, if we were all on-fire for Jesus? Some fear that would mean a more charismatic worship movement in our churches, and maybe that would mean that in places; but that's not necessarily what defines what it means to have our light turned on.

Paul defines living in the light as walking in goodness, righteousness, and truth and finding out what pleases God. Living in the light calls Christians to imitate Jesus and love others as he first loved us. When we are moved by our spiritual excitement and passion for Jesus, we exude his presence, so much so, that people notice that there's something different about us, and they are drawn to want to know what it is that we possess to make us this way.

Paul tells us that it's critically important that we walk awake in the light during those hum times of our lives, not just when there is a crisis occurring and advancing darkness around us. The light of Christ that shines through us every day exposes the darkness vying for our attention and the souls of others. Paul tells us it's important that we expose the darkness, not

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separate ourselves from those who are stuck in it. If we are going to expose the darkness for the evil it is, we need to break out of our safe sanctuaries to share the light of Christ.

Having said that, Paul does not direct us to expose the disobedient by calling them out and telling them they are evil. Paul says that our conversation should be gracious, effective and pleasant without accusation. (Colossians 4:6). Who would want to listen to and believe a person's message of God's love if they are spoken to in a judgmental and demeaning manner?

I confess that I find myself lacking the words for what I am feeling in my soul, especially after being reminded of a time when I experienced a monumental awakening of Christians, a movement of on-fire Christians that changed my life, forever.

Churches have empty pews. Some are even closing. Is this because we haven't invited people to join us? Or could it be something more? Something missing in the lives of Christians? A light, a spark, energy that relays our joy in knowing Jesus as Savior of our lives. Do we talk about him? Do we communicate how he has made a difference in our lives?

Have we invited someone to church, to meet Jesus, just as you do through your time with your church family? Have you spoken to a youth or a young person, loving on them to make them feel a part of God's family, not just on Sunday morning if you bump into them, but going out of your way to do something as simple as sending them a note of encouragement? Are we being personal in sharing our light so that others might see and desire this special something, this Jesus that we know?