

SUNDAY MARCH 29

O give thanks unto the Lord for He is good and His steadfast love remains forever. I hope many of you were able to take advantage of yesterday's devotion. If not... We make our beginning in the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

P. Let us pray: Father of mercies and God of all consolation, come to the aid of your people, turning us from our sin to live for you alone. Give us the power of your Holy Spirit that we may attend to your Word, confess our sins, receive your forgiveness, and grow into the fullness of your Son Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Redeemer.

C. Amen

P. We are witnesses to all that Jesus did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree. But God raised him on the third day and made him to appear. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

Silence for reflection and self-examination.

P. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Silence for reflection on God's Word and for self-examination

P. Let us then confess our sins unto God our Father:

C. I, a troubled and penitent sinner, confess to you all my sins and iniquities with which I have offended you and for which I justly deserve your punishment. But I am sorry for them, and repent of them, and pray for your boundless mercy. For the sake of the suffering and death of your Son, Jesus Christ, be gracious and merciful to me, a poor sinful being; forgive my sins, give me your Holy Spirit for the amendment of my sinful life, and bring me to life everlasting. Amen

P. Almighty God in his mercy has given his Son to die for us and, for his sake, forgives us all our sins. Through his Holy Spirit he cleanses us and gives us power to proclaim the mighty deeds of God who called us out of darkness into the splendor of his light. As a called and ordained minister of the Church of Christ and by his authority, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C. Amen

Jeremiah 31:31-34 The New Covenant

³¹ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Heb 5:1-9

For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. ³ Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. ⁴ And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

⁵ So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him,

"You are my Son,
today I have begotten you";

⁶ as he says also in another place,

"You are a priest forever,
after the order of Melchizedek."

⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus^[a] offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. ⁸ Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. ⁹ And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.

In ancient and modern times, Lent has been the time for instruction of candidates preparing for their baptism at the Easter Vigil. At the same time, the whole Church anticipates Easter through acts of repentance and spiritual renewal. It is therefore appropriate that we review the basics of our faith during Lent, so that we all might be renewed by our baptismal covenants and made ready for the celebration of Easter.

For the confession of our faith this morning we are going to look at Luther's teaching from the small catechism on the Apostle's Creed. The First Article of the Apostles' Creed concerns Creation. What does it mean?

C. I believe that God has created me and all that exists. He has given me and still preserves my body and soul with all their powers. He provides me with food and clothing, home and family, daily work, and all I need from day to day. God also protects me in time of danger and guards me from every evil. All this he does out of fatherly and divine goodness and mercy, though I do not deserve it. Therefore I surely ought to thank and praise, serve and obey him. This is most certainly true.

P. The Second Article of the Creed concerns Redemption. What does this mean?

C. I believe that Jesus Christ -- true God, Son of the Father from eternity, and true man, born of the Virgin Mary -- is my Lord. At great cost he has saved and redeemed me, a lost and condemned person. He has freed me from sin, death, and the power of the devil -- not with silver or gold, but with his holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. All this he has done that I may be his own, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true.

P. The Third Article of the Creed concerns Sanctification. What does this mean?

C. I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and kept me in true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it united with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church day after day he fully forgives my sins and the sins of all believers. On the last day he will raise me and all the dead and give me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true.

SERMON

Walking in light in Ephesians 5:8-14:

“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), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. 13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

In Jesus' day it was required to go to Jerusalem 3 times a year to celebrate the great Feasts:

(1) Feast of Unleavened Bread.

(2) Feast of Harvest.

(3) Feast of Ingathering, also known as the Feast of Booths, or Feast of Tabernacles.

The third Feast, the feast of Ingathering, took place around mid-October. It lasted for 7 days. It was associated with the end of the harvest season. The people camped in shelters, or tents, in the open fields outside the city of Jerusalem. It was a reminder of the wilderness wandering. That's why it was also known as the Feast of Booths.

During the second year of Jesus' ministry, he was in Jerusalem for the Feast of Ingathering. On the last day of the festival, Jesus spoke to a great crowd of people and proclaimed, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). Jesus is the light of the world! Paul calls Christians to be imitators of God. We imitate God by walking in light. 3 Points:

NUMBER ONE: We Walk in Light by Exhibiting Light.

"for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord."

Paul was writing to the believers in the church of Ephesus. Prior to their salvation, believers were darkness. However, following their conversion to Christ, believers now are light in the Lord.

Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse, explained it this way: **"When Christ was in the world, he was like the shining sun. When the sun sets, the moon comes up. The moon is a picture of believers, the Church. The Church shines, but not with its own light. It shines with reflected light. At times the Church has been a full moon dazzling the world with an almost daytime light. Those were times of great enlightenment. For example, in the days of Paul and Luther and Wesley. At other times the Church has been only a thumbnail moon, and in those days very little light shone on the earth. But whether the Church is a full or thumbnail moon, whether waxing or waning, it reflects the light of Christ. Our light does not originate with us."**

As believers we're a reflection of the light of Christ. We actually become light ourselves. **"...for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord."** That is staggering! Of course, our light is derived from Christ. It exists because of our union with Christ. It is not a ray of light that comes from ourselves.

Because of our union with Christ, Paul commands believers to, **"Walk as children of light."** Just as Jesus is the light of the world, we are to walk as he walked—as lights of the world. In fact, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said to his followers, **"You're the light of the world." Here's a truth: "You are the light of the world, but the switch must be turned on."**

We are stars, bold, blazing, light-giving stars No need to shout, scream, or make a scene. Just shine."

But in exactly what way are believers "light"? Paul described the characteristics of light like this **"...for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true."** The phrase "the fruit of light" describes the result of union with Christ. Christ, who is God, is good and right and true. As his imitators, Christians do that which is good and right and true.

Tony Merida describes the meaning of **"good and right and true"** when he writes, **"Here this trio of virtues seems to be a summary of the ethical content previously covered in Ephesians & resembles the fruit of the Spirit. Those who walk in light do 'good works', they live righteously, and they speak truthfully."** In order to encourage believers to walk in light by exhibiting light, Paul said, **"...and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord."** The phrase "try to discern" means "to try, prove, discern, distinguish, approve. It has the notion of proving a thing whether it is worthy or not. In other words, as Christians we exhibit what is good and right and true. We will, as John MacArthur says, **"give verification or evidence that they are who they claim to be, children of God and of light."**

NUMBER TWO: We Walk in Light by Exposing Darkness. (5:11-14a)

Paul said to believers **in verse 11, "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them."** This is an echo of what Paul wrote in verse 3, **"But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you."** This view is strengthened by what Paul said in verse 12, **"For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret."** What unbelievers do is darkness. Christians must not do what they formerly did. Nor must Christians take part in any way in the unfruitful works of darkness. Christians must instead expose them, that is, Christians must expose the unfruitful works of darkness.

But how are Christians to do that? How do we take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness and yet still expose them? Sometimes Christians expose darkness simply because of our presence.

However, at other times we must speak up. Our resource for exposing the unfruitful works of darkness is the word of God.

The Psalmist said in Psalm 119:105, **"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."** That is why Paul said in verses 13-14, **"But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light."**

A better translation for verse 14b is, **"for it is light that makes everything visible."** So, verses 13-14 would read as follows, **"But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible."** That is

why it is so important for Christians to know God's word. It is the light of God's word that exposes darkness.

NUMBER THREE: We Walk in Light by Exhorting Unbelievers. (5:14b)

Paul said in verse 14b, **"Therefore it says, 'Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'**" It is also likely that these words were adapted from Isaiah 60:1, which reads, **"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you."** These words are prophetic and find their fulfillment in none other than Jesus Christ, the Messiah for whom every godly Jew had so long hoped.

"O sleeper" describes every unbeliever who walks in darkness, produces "the unfruitful works of darkness," and is unaware of his lost condition and tragic destiny. That is why we who walk in light must exhort unbelievers to "awake"!

"Arise from the dead" is the exhortation to repent. It is an appeal to the unbeliever to turn from the dead ways of sin.

"Christ will shine on you" is the good news of the gospel that God has provided a remedy for every sinful person who repents of sin and believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners.

John MacArthur tells the story of a great fire in Edinburgh, Scotland, in which people hurried to exit the building through a passage that led to the street. They were almost safe when a rush of smoke met them, blowing into the passage from the outside. Instead of running through the smoke, they entered a door into a room that seemed safe. But soon all the oxygen was exhausted and they all suffocated. If only they had seen the light they might have lived.

Horatius Bonar wrote:

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"I am this dark world's light;
Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise,
And all thy day be bright."

I looked to Jesus, and I found
In Him my star, my sun;
And in that light of life I'll walk,
Till traveling days are done.

I exhort you today to “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” We imitate God by walking in light. And we walk in light by exhibiting light, exposing darkness, and exhorting unbelievers. Let us make a commitment to do that every day so as to reflect the light of God that is in us.

1

Pray for the Lord to intervene to **stop the spread of the coronavirus**. Pray in Jesus’ name that the virus would recede from this day forward, and that the numbers of those infected would decline rapidly. Pray, trusting the Lord to intervene today with his loving care.

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him. – 1 John 5:14

2

Pray for **those who are sick**, that they will have access to the care and treatment they need. Pray for peace and perseverance amidst suffering. Pray for those in isolation who are cut off from their normal routines and support systems, that they would seek their strength in Jesus. Pray encouragement for the thousands in quarantine, waiting to find out if they have the virus.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. – Psalm 46:1

3

Pray for **health workers** who are caring for those with COVID-19. Pray for their protection from the virus, for stamina during long and intense work hours, and for safe protocols to be observed in healthcare institutions in order to keep them protected. Pray for health workers to seek the Lord during this crisis.

Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. – Psalm 107:28

4

Pray for **grieving families** who have lost loved ones to the coronavirus. Even as their hearts are breaking, pray they would know the nearness and comfort of the Holy Spirit. Pray that they would feel compassion from the Lord and from friends and neighbors coming around them. Pray against despair; pray for new mercies every morning.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 4:6-7

5

Pray for **pastors** serving their churches and communities affected and infected by COVID-19. We pray that the Holy Spirit would give these shepherd-leaders the right words for the right time and the right actions for each situation. Pray they would speak the gospel in heart, word and deed to each person they minister to.

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. ... The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. – James 5:14, 16

6

Pray for **the body of Christ worldwide**, that the church would rise up to pray and to support the sick and their caregivers in practical and sacrificial ways. Pray for the church to be a light on a hill in hospitals, communities and cities where God has placed them. Pray for an outpouring of love, compassion and service, in Jesus' name.

But God has composed the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its members should have mutual concern for one another. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each of you is a member of it. – 1 Corinthians 12:24-27

7

Pray for **government officials and decision-makers** who are leading countries and organizations through the crisis. We acknowledge that the Lord has allowed each one to be in a place of influence during this time. Pray they would mobilize resources quickly and effectively to where they are most needed. Pray for all those working behind the scenes and for the good administration and execution of response efforts worldwide.

Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper. – Jeremiah 29:7

8

Pray for **those waking up each day to fallout caused by COVID-19**, that they would reach out to the Lord. Pray for people to earnestly seek the Lord. We know the desire to seek the Lord comes from the Lord, and we know he will meet them. Pray for those whose businesses and livelihoods are ruined by the halt in many sectors of the economy. Pray for those who may lose jobs and salaries. For each one, we pray new beginnings with the Lord walking by their side.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you." – Jeremiah 29:11, 12

9

Pray for **our mission co-workers worldwide** today, especially those serving in areas acutely impacted by COVID-19. Pray for wisdom for each ministry team to know how to carry out their responsibilities. We pray that ministries would not have to shut down, but that the Lord would carry them through this difficult time, for his glory.

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. – 2 Corinthians 4:8-10

10

Pray for **all those who live and die without the knowledge of Jesus** to hear about him through this crisis and respond to his love. We pray salvation for every man, woman and child in the world today. Through eyes of faith, we see them becoming our brothers and sisters in Christ. Ask in Jesus' name for the gift of salvation for many to come out of this crisis.

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise, as some understand slowness but is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance. – 2 Peter 3:9

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy **kingdom** come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, & the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you always