

Shine, Divinity, Shine

Ephesians 5:8-14

When Paul gathered together the first Christians in the City of Ephesus, he was very clear about his expectations of them. Paul had very high expectations. Sometimes churches today, like Divinity, get criticized because our expectations of one another as brothers and sisters in Christ are not high enough.

St. Paul begins chapter 5 by reminding us that because we have received the gift of forgiveness, we ought to be “imitators of God.”

Verses 1-2: “God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

That’s a huge if not impossible expectation. Because God adopted us as his children in Holy Baptism, we should imitate him. We should “live in love, as Christ loved us.”

Then in verses 3-7, the verses immediately preceding today’s text, Paul tells us what actions do not imitate God.

³But fornication and impurity of any kind, or greed, must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴Entirely out of place is obscene, silly, and vulgar talk; but instead, let there be thanksgiving. ⁵Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷Therefore do not be associated with them.

Then in verse 8, the first verse of our text, Paul tells his parishioners that you used to do some of those things, but now that you are a baptized child of God, I expect you to change, I expect you to be remade, I expect you to be renewed, I expect you to be transformed, I expect you to be “children of light.”

“For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light — for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.”

Notice Paul doesn’t say that “you were in darkness”. He says, “You were darkness”. Paul doesn’t say “you are in the light”. He says, “You are in the Lord and you are light.”

“You are light”. You were darkness but now you are light. Paul is telling us that our actions and our identity are closely connected. We are identified by our behavior.

Consequently, we are to behave accordingly. As the old Bible Camp song reminds us, “they will know we are Christians by our love”.

But for us it’s not nearly as black and white as it was for the first century Christians. In Ephesus they were moving from not being baptized to whole families being baptized into God’s family. They were moving from worshiping the human Caesar of Rome to worshiping Jesus Christ crucified on a Roman cross. They were darkness, but now in the Lord they were light.

Most of us, on the other hand, were baptized into God’s family as infants. Our parents, our grandparents, our sponsors, our congregation promised to raise us as children of God, to “live as children of light”. And often, they did a good job of teaching us to “live as children of light”.

My generation often heard the story from a parent or grandparent of how they had to walk to school in five foot of snow, uphill both ways. And the way grandpa told it, enduring a

long, treacherous walk to elementary school is a badge of honor and a rite of passage.

I read that in response to those kinds of grandpa stories, 14 years ago, someone started the “International Walk to School Day.” It’s celebrated on October 6 when parents are encouraged to walk their children to school and teach them the safest possible path. A parent ought to be teaching their child to walk right, to walk safe, or as Paul writes, to “walk as children of the light”. Who taught you to walk well, to walk the safest path, to walk the right path? Who are you teaching to “live as children of light?”

But no matter how good a job our parents, grandparents, or congregation did in teaching us to “live as children of light”, most of us still experienced darkness, many of us still walked the way of the prodigal son or daughter and got lost in the darkness.

Yesterday, I presided at a funeral for a son of this congregation – 48 year old Roland Litz. He was confirmed here as you can tell from the picture, in 1977. Roland was divorced twice, but was blessed with two beautiful children – 18 year old Robyn and 15 year old Tyler. Roland's adult life was a struggle, but God never abandoned him to the darkness.

Sometimes it’s only after we hit bottom that the lights come on. It’s only after an alcoholic or a drug addict hits bottom that the light can come on. We now have about 200 people meeting in Divinity on Monday and Tuesday nights and Saturday mornings as part of our three A.A. groups. Divinity lights are shining in those rooms where people who have walked in the darkness of alcoholism or drug addiction come together to support one another and to work the 12 steps to “living as children of light” rather than darkness.

Via de Cristo groups of people gather in our rooms and at this kneeling rail to pray for our Divinity brothers and sisters and to support one another during times of crisis and darkness.

Divinity's Stephen Ministers and homebound communion carriers go out from the light of our worship time, go out from the light of praising God together in Word and song, go out from the light of receiving Christ's presence in the bread and wine – and share that light in what is often the darkness and loneliness of a hospital room, a nursing home room, and even in their own home, left alone and shut-in.

Tomorrow morning we gather to give thanks for and to remember another son of Divinity – 55 year old Pastor Dave Smith. As a pastor, I can assure you that Dave knew all too well the darkness and loneliness of a hospital room, a nursing home room, the living room of a shut-in with whom he shared the light receiving Christ's presence in the bread and wine many times. He, too, was blessed with beautiful children all in their twenties – Tom, Sarah, Andy, and Abby and a beautiful wife of 27 years – Nancie. Dave shined the light of Christ in many people's lives.

“You are light. Live as children of light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.”

The fruit of the light is found in each of our Sunday School rooms every Sunday morning as our teachers share the light of Christ with our children, laying a foundation of faith that can withstand the darkness of life that each of our children will walk through at some point as they grow older and more and more independent.

For those of us who went off to college, we know the temptations of campus life. For those of us who went into the military, we know the temptations of military life. For those of us who went off into our first job, we know the temptations of free time and having a little money in our pocket. For those of us who never left home, we know the temptations of co-dependence

and addiction to mom's cooking. But no matter what darkness we find ourselves groping in, we are standing on the firm foundation of the light of Christ that we received at the baptismal font, that was nurtured in our Sunday School and Confirmation classes, and that our parents and families gifted us with by teaching us and modeling for us that we are light in the Lord that live as children of light.

But as Paul reminds us in the last verses of our text, when we live as children of light, when we as a congregation are truly shining, some pretty scary stuff is exposed.

¹¹Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; ¹³but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

I think Paul describes why so many people are hesitant to join a church, hesitant to join an A.A. group or any other support group, hesitant to go on a weekend Via de Cristo retreat or any retreat, hesitant to become a Stephen Minister or Sunday School teacher, hesitant to join a Bible Study group, hesitant to meet new people and make new friends – because we value our privacy and fear exposing any darkness in our lives. We become not only comfortable, but protective of the way things are. We fear change. We avoid light and exposure. We cocoon. Too much light hurts our eyes and makes us vulnerable. We choose darkness.

To which Paul proclaims: "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you!"

Come out from the darkness of your cocoon. Walk out of your tomb. "For once you were darkness, and now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light!"

Shine, Divinity, Shine as we join together in the Lenten Litany printed in your bulletin . .

P: The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.

C: May Christ shine on us.

P: He redeemed our souls from going down to the pit, and we will live to enjoy the light.

C: May Christ shine on us.

P: You are the light of the world.

C: May Christ shine on us.

P: For once you were in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.

C: May Christ shine on us.

May the peace of God . . .

Sermon - #677 – This Little Light of Mine

Recessional - #671 – Shine, Jesus, Shine.