

Ephesians 5:6-21
“Filled with Wisdom, Light and Life”
Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

August 19, 2018
First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

As our days become shorter and shorter, and our nights become longer and longer, many of us will be driving more at night.

If it wasn't for headlights on these nightly drives, it would be difficult to see the road, but thanks to technology, we can. But, headlights can't show us everything around us. For darkness still is more overpowering than the headlights.

I remember driving through the Missouri Ozarks one evening. It was a windy road and I could only see what was up to that next curve. Since I was unfamiliar with the landscape, I drove slower and I'm glad I did.

You see, just down a few more turns were a few deer crossing the road.

If I was going a bit faster, I wouldn't have had time to slow down.

Even with headlights leading us on our way, we can't see everything, so we should be prepared for anything.

[Darkness]

Today, there is more darkness than there is light. Now, I'm not saying that the sun is burning out. I'm talking about darkness in the world today. Darkness is following the world's values, rather than the wisdom given to us from the Triune God – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In today's epistle, the Apostle Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write again to the Church in Ephesus and also to us.

Paul wrote, ***“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience”*** (Ephesians 5:6).

So, what is Paul talking about? Well, to get the full context, we have to go back to the verses that immediately lead up to today’s reading.

Paul wrote, ***“But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving”*** (Ephesians 5:3-4).

You see, the Church at Ephesus has had a lot of problems, especially with sexual sins and being crude. And, there were many who were saying that those who committed those sinful deeds would not be punished by anyone, including the one true God.

Before Paul came to Ephesus, the Ephesians worshipped the goddess Artemis, the Greek fertility goddess. In fact, her monumental temple in Ephesus was one of the chief wonders of the ancient world. It was so monumental that this temple spanned an area three or four times as large as the Parthenon in Athens.

So, worshipping Artemis was a big deal and people came to Ephesus from miles around to worship her and they would spend big money at the local markets, too.

Paul has had clashes with the people in Ephesus in the past, but now many in Ephesus have become Christian. Paul, here, is writing to those people.

He is writing to people who are in the world, but as Christians are not of the world.

[TED Talk]

More and more these days, sexual immorality is seen as just a choice, rather than a sin against God.

And, there are many who now believe that sexual immorality is not even a choice, but that you are born that way.

Recently, a TED Talk focused upon pedophilia, which is a psychological disorder where an adult is sexually attracted to pre-pubescent children.

Now, TED is a media organization that posts talks online for free distribution under the slogan “ideas worth spreading.” TED Talks focus on scientific, cultural, and academic topics.

In this recent TED Talk event, the speaker said, “Pedophilia is an unchangeable sexual orientation, just like... heterosexuality.”¹

This speaker was attempting to normalize pedophilia.

She continued, “Just like pedophiles, we are not responsible for our feelings. We do not choose them...but it is our responsibility to...overcome our negative feelings about pedophiles and to treat them with the same respect we treat other people with.”

This slippery slope of sexual immorality has been slipped on so many times that it has become ice.

Since that TED Talk, the organization was forced to remark, because of negative comments.

TED stated: “After reviewing the talk, we believe it cites research in ways that are open to serious misinterpretation. This led some viewers to interpret the talk as an argument in favor of an illegal and harmful practice. TED would like to make clear that it does not promote pedophilia.”²

This is the icy slope that we are on as a culture. This is a culture in darkness, rather than the light.

[Idols]

As we heard in today’s readings, when things get tough, it is easier to just go back to the way it was before you followed the true God.

Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel and said to the people, **“Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods’”** (Joshua 24:1-2).

¹ <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/ted-speaker-pedophilia-is-an-unchangeable-sexual-orientation-anyone-could-b>

² <https://blog.ted.com/tedx-talk-under-review/>

Over and over again, the Israelites would rather serve another god, rather than the one true God. And, over and over again, they would have to pay for that mistake. They were led on the wrong path, they were attacked and they were exiled.

But, in the end, God was still there for them when they repented of their wrongdoings.

Likewise, many of us today would rather serve another god, rather than the one true God. Many of us would rather serve our political party, rather than God. Many of us would rather take advice from politicians, actors and athletes, rather than the truth of God. Many of us would rather be liked by the sinful culture and forget that we are to be a holy Christian people.

Those Ephesians were no different than the Israelites of Joshua's time. They wanted to do all the same things. They wanted to be liked by their friends outside the Christian faith, so many began to live like their unbelieving friends.

The same is true about those disciples who left Jesus. When His words became tough, they just walked away.

They said, ***"This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"*** (John 6:60).

So, where are you? Are you like the Israelites, the Ephesians and those grumbling disciples, because being a Christian is too tough?

Do you live out your Christian faith? Do you love God with all your heart and mind and love your neighbor as yourself?

[Wisdom]

As we grow up in our lives, we want to become wise. Sadly, many in today's world argue that becoming wise is to not acknowledge God as the giver of all gifts. But, true wisdom is not found in us, but outside of us.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding" (Psalm 111:10).

We all become wise when we ***"fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness"*** (Joshua 24:14).

We fear the Lord when we are in awe and reverence of Him. We become wise when we revere Him and respect Him and His Word.

[Light]

As I have already stated, there is a battle between light and darkness. As Paul wrote, **“For at a time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light”** (Ephesians 5:8).

Now, in regard to spiritual and divine matters, Scripture labels people by nature “darkness.”

We were called “darkness” because we were born with the sin of Adam and Eve, and thus, it is in our nature to reject God.

As our Lutheran Confessions say in the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord:

“The light shines in the darkness (that is, in the dark, blind world, which does not know or grasp God), and the darkness did not comprehend it.”³
(FC-Solid Declaration, 545.10)

Like the Ephesians, we were in darkness, but now, we have been brought to the marvelous light. We have become light through our baptism when we were adopted by the Triune God. In remembering our baptism, we remember that there is a divine defense against the spiritual dangers around us⁴, since God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit is always with us.

In this way, an appeal to baptism serves as an “encouragement” that enables Christians to step forth along the path of Christ, rather than following the sinful world.

As **“children of light”**, we are to **“take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead to expose them”** (Ephesians 5:11).

We expose the darkness, so we know how to walk, not as unwise but as wise. Instead of being foolish, we are to do as Paul does: follow the functions of God’s Law.

³ Kolb-Wengert. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2000), 545).

⁴ Thomas Winger, *Concordia Commentary: Ephesians* (Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 2015), 577.

Paul, here, is concerned with the Ephesians' holiness – which is not a matter of behavior, but of their closeness to the one true God, since being unclean – being sinful – separates people from God.⁵

Today's epistle serves as a warning against returning to the deeds of the old life that would deny the Ephesian Christians the blessed enjoyment of God's presence. Here, Paul aims to **prevent, or curb**, them from returning to idolatry. He **condemns them, or shows them a mirror of themselves**, for speaking longingly of the pleasures of their old life. Paul also **exhorts them, or guides them**, to expose and avoid evil works and to instead follow the goodness, righteousness and truth of Jesus Christ.

All the three functions of the Law – **curb, mirror, and guide** – serve Paul's intention of warning the Ephesians – and us – away from what will cause them and us great spiritual harm and direct them and us to what is wholesome in the Lord.⁶

So, as Christians, we are to *“look carefully how [we] walk, not as unwise but wise... and to not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is”* (Ephesians 5:15, 17).

[Life]

For in walking in the light of Christ, we receive eternal life.

As many disciples turned back and no longer wanted to walk in the path of Jesus, Jesus said to the Twelve, *“Do you want to go away as well?”* (John 6:67).

Simon Peter answered Jesus, *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life”* (John 6:68).

You see, our sinful nature lusts for temporal things, such as bread and material goods, rather than the things of God, which cannot help in spiritual matters. These grumbling disciples were only seeking temporal things, rather than eternal things.

When Jesus was offering His flesh to eat, these grumbling disciples could not understand it.

⁵ Winger, 574.

⁶ Winger, 575.

As people living on the other side of Christ's resurrection, we know what Jesus was referring to – He was saying that through His death, we have life. So, through His body and blood shed on the cross, we too have eternal life. We receive life as a gift by grace through faith in Him. We receive this grace because we believe Jesus is the Christ like Simon Peter when he said, ***“We have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God”*** (John 6:69).

Through faith in Christ as our Lord and Savior, we are given forgiveness of sins, salvation and life everlasting. We know that Jesus has destroyed the power of sin, death and Satan by His death, resurrection and ascension.

We receive this forgiveness and strengthening of our faith when we confess our sins to God our Father and when we receive Christ's true body and true blood at this altar.

So, to whom shall we go? We go to the Triune God – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – for in Him alone we have wisdom, light and life. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠