

Written: March 19, 2020

Reflection for Sunday, March 22, 2020

Beloved Friends,

Grace and Peace to you.

As I sit down to write this “sermon” or “meditation” I feel more like I’m writing a letter to you. Many of you will be getting this sermon in the mail and reading it as if it’s a letter. Some of you will be reading it from your email inboxes. Hopefully, technology willing, some of you will be listening to this on YouTube.

I’m reminded that the earliest church did much of its ministry through letter writing. A minister or apostle would write a letter, and someone would take it to a church in a distant city or town. People would find inspiration in a letter and would copy it and send it on to another church. It was probably sent to a church that was meeting in someone’s home—just a small group of folks gathered together to read scriptures and letters, to sing songs, and to break bread. That’s what happened with this letter to the Ephesians where we find our scripture for this service. It was sent out far and wide, circulating from household to household, church to church.

The portion of the Letter to the Ephesians that we have read today is a powerful and compelling one. It’s an invitation for us to shine bright, to be the light that we were meant to be. In times like these, when things feel shadowed and scary, our neighbors need us to be a bright light. “For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you *are light*,” the scripture says. We will know that we are being light because the fruit of our living will be “good and right and true.” How can we be light...really *be* light...in the days and weeks and months ahead?

I was reading what one of my seminary teachers, Ron Allen, and his friend Clark Williamson wrote about this passage. This passage is so much about who Christ has made us to be. They write that “through the faithfulness of God we no longer walk in darkness but are indeed ‘children of light.’ The imperative ‘walk’...follows the indicative ‘you are light.’ Being precedes doing; new being precedes new doing. We are asked to do nothing that God’s grace does not already empower us to do. We are to become who we are.”¹

As followers of Christ, transformed by God’s amazing love, we are light for the world. I’ve been trying to figure out ways that we can shine brightly. I admit that there have been moments in the last few days that I haven’t been my brightest. I have felt the strain of what is happening get to me. My exhaustion has made me short, at times, with people I love. I’ve given too much time and energy to my frustrations. When this happens, I know that I need to step back, center myself, pray, listen to a song, breathe. When I do that, I think my light gets a little stronger.

Just a week ago, the Zion council had a conference call to make a decision about our in-person gatherings. We decided to pause our in-person gatherings for two weeks, at which time we would reassess the situation we’re in. So much has changed in just one week. The day that I’m writing this “letter” is the day the governor announced that all schools in the state of Indiana will be closed at least through May 1. That’s takes us well past Holy Week and Easter. I hoped so much that we would be together again, but I think our wilderness journey will extend further than we anticipated. We’ll have to see.

¹ Ronald J. Allen and Clark M. Williamson, *Preaching the Letters without Dismissing the Law: a Lectionary Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), p. 39.

None of us have been untouched by the disruptions caused by this virus. This Sunday we were supposed to be having a beautiful laity service where some of our members were going to share their “mountain top experiences” from their faith journeys. They were stepping up to lead you in worship because I was going to be with family celebrating my brother’s wedding. This week brought hard decisions for family and friends who realized they needed to stay home, not just so that they could stay well, but so that we could all help keep each other and our neighbors well. Instead of a big celebration surrounded by family and friends, just a few of us will be gathering in my brother’s living for a short ceremony. We will be cautious and keep a distance and wash our hands.

I’m sad for my brother and his fiancé. This was not what they had been hoping for. It hurts to not be able to share this moment with family and friends. We’re going to try to use technology the best we can to make it so that people can still see a video of the ceremony. It’s not the same as being together. Nothing can take the place of being near the ones we love, but for now, it will have to do.

These disruptions and bigger ones will find their way into our lives and the lives of those we love. You might be experiencing this already. You probably are experiencing this already. It is precisely in moments like these when we need to be what God created us to be—a bright light. We can be a bright light by offering encouragement and care. We can be a bright light by being a compassionate, listening ear. We can be a bright light by reminding people how deeply they are loved. We can be a bright light by reminding people that though we are separated by physical distance, they are not alone—we are not alone—as we continue to walk this path that we are on.

I hope that our ministry together will help strengthen your light in the days to come. Next week, a council member will be calling our members to see if you are interested in being part of a phone tree, as a way to connect with one another, to hear each other's voices, to remember that Christ keeps us together no matter what. We especially want to do this because we know that not everyone has a computer or smartphone or internet. For those who do have access to technology, Craig and I are working at putting together a Facebook group so that some of you will be able to join an online Bible Study. Wednesday evenings, I'll be on Facebook for a time of prayer. Even if you're not on Facebook, I think I'll be able to send you a link in your email so that you can still be part of that. I'm learning, slowly but surely. We'll keep trying to be creative about ways that we can come together as the church to tend to our light.

For so long, the church consisted of small groups of faithful followers who worshiped in their homes where they read scripture and letters, sang songs, and broke bread. We can carry on these ancient traditions.

The world needs us right now, and we need each other. God has brought us together at Zion so that we have friends for the journey, especially in moments like these. It's not going to be an easy road, but the light of Christ will strengthen us and lead us on.

Church, awake! Rise! Christ *will* shine on you (5:14).

Peace be to the whole community, and love with faith, from God our Creator and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ (5:23-24).

With love,
Pastor Sarah