

..... **Daily Devotions**

Devotions – April 25 – May 1, 2021

By Pastor Doug Norquist

St. Paul Lutheran Church, Ironwood, MI

Sunday April 25, 2021

Text: 1 Peter 2:9 (NASB)

“...that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

Not long ago, I found myself spending two entire days with my eyes closed. (There is no need to go into detail, except to say that I was waiting to see an eye doctor; I knew it was not a sight-threatening emergency; and now I am okay.)

As I stumbled around, I imagine that I looked pitiful and comical by turns – or perhaps both at once.

What a relief when I could go about with my eyes open again! Things for me went from darkness to light. It gave me a new understanding of Jesus’ metaphor, “When your eyes are sound, the whole body will be lit up” (Matthew 6:22). It was not just my eyes that at last saw things – it was my whole being.

In the New Testament, the gospel is presented as something that lights up the whole being. Christ has come, Christ’s light has shone in the world, Christ’s work has been completed. Everything necessary has been done on our behalf.

Now in Christ, through the Word and by the Holy Spirit, God calls to us. It is a call out of darkness into God’s marvelous light. Somehow a people of God is called into being – and you and I, by grace, are called to be part of it.

One thinks of these words from Martin Luther’s *Small Catechism*: “I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy, and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith.”

May this light shine brightly for you – and in you. May you know that when Christ died and rose, he died and rose *for you*. Today, may God’s call do its work in you, and in me.

Let us pray: *Sometimes I stumble around in the dark. Help me rather to walk in your light. Open the eyes of my heart to see – bring your light to bear on my whole being. Keep calling me out of darkness into your marvelous light, that I may proclaim your excellencies. And help me to remember that the call to hear you, is also a call to be part of your church. Please keep us all in the one common, true faith. Amen.*



Monday, April 26, 2021

Text: 1 Peter 2:9 (NASB)

“...that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

During the covid-19 pandemic, especially recently, we often hear talk of “the light at the end of the tunnel”. This is a cliché, of course, but it helps us to focus forward on the prospect of new and better days.

Not long ago, the governor of Michigan remarked that we can see the light, but we are still in the tunnel. She was calling us, on one hand, to hope. But on the other hand, she was asking us not to become complacent.

What she has said about the pandemic, we can also say of the Christian life. We can, if we are looking, see the light; but we are still in the tunnel. This is, I’m afraid, *always* true until Jesus calls us home. We hope the pandemic will be under control within weeks or months. But we know that the tunnel of life in this world could last decades. If you sometimes admit to being weary, you are by no means the first.

But there are differences. Now, it is true that in one sense, the light toward which we travel is God’s promise of eternal life in Christ. It is a seemingly distant beacon towards which we keep travelling.

But that is not the only way the scriptures point us to God’s light. Consider these:

“Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105). God’s Word can be like a flashlight that doesn’t necessarily show us everything at once, but at least enough to help us take the next step.

“Jesus...said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life’” (John 8:12). Our Savior has been, is now, and will be the Light of the world for us.

“If we walk in the light, as God is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Whereas in one sense we walk *towards* the light of Christ, in another sense we walk *in* the light. And take note that we are to do this *together*.

“You [disciples] are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). Once we see God’s light in Christ, we can become light for one another and the world. We are not meant to stumble on alone.

What I have shared here is by no means exhaustive. But it is enough to point us to the light of God which shines – not just at the *end* of the tunnel, but *within* it.

Let us pray: *Shine your light, O God: behind us, before us, around us, within us, and through us. Bring us forward to that fullness of true light that we call heaven. But do not let us wait till then. Even now, may we walk in the light. Amen.*



Tuesday, April 27, 2021

Text: 1 Peter 2:9-10 (NASB)

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. For you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

Sometimes the connection between scripture and life seems more direct in the case of a convert. There are those (and thank God for them) who could read these verses, and then tell their own dramatic story: “I was frequenting whorehouses and getting drunk every night, but then Jesus got hold of me....” You have perhaps heard some of these testimonies. Some of you could perhaps *tell* such a story.

Then there are the people who, like me, have been blessed with a boring testimony: “I’ve loved Jesus all my life, and though I know I’m a sinner, by God’s grace I’ve never gotten in trouble much...”

For those of us who do not have a dramatic “before and after” story, how should we read a passage like this? It would surely have made sense to the original recipients, who had all once lived life apart from Christ, and now had become his followers. But what about us – there are many in the Lutheran fold – who simply do not remember a “before Christ” period in our lives? Should we simply ignore a passage like this?

Well, here are a few observations.

First, there is our baptism. We may not remember the time before our baptism, but there was one. I can say of my baptism, “I believe that in that moment, God called me out of darkness and

into God’s marvelous light. Over time this began to work itself out in my consciousness. But I am so fortunate that God *called* me then.”

Second, there is the contemplation of where I would be without God’s grace. There is a good deal of darkness that *could have been*. But truly, I’d *much* rather contemplate the light into which God called me.

Third, there is what we might call the process of Christian life – the process, if you will, of conversion. Again and again, God must call me out of the darkness of doing things my way, and into God’s own light.

Think on these words from Martin Luther’s *Small Catechism*: “[Baptism] signifies that the old person in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily sorrow for sin and through repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”

Let us pray: *Keep calling me, O God, out of darkness and into your marvelous light. Keep calling your whole church in this way. Please bring forth many new believers. May your kingdom come among us, and your will be done. Amen.*



Wednesday, April 28, 2021

Text: 1 Peter 2:9 (NASB)

“... that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

I have hesitated to write this one. I’m not sure I’m qualified to handle it properly. I’m not certain that I can make my thoughts plain to all. But it seems I have to try.

What I have been writing about is – to use some fancy words – the presence or privation of electromagnetic radiance within the visible spectrum. You walk into an unlit room, flip a switch, and the room is lit. It “went from darkness to light”. Following the biblical writers, I have used this as a metaphor about the work of God in a person’s life.

But there is a difficulty. There are people –from what I gather, it is not a small number – who have difficulty perceiving the metaphor in this way. Rather it strikes their minds as being about pigment – light skin, or dark skin. I even hear – and it breaks my heart – that some have literally said, on some kind of religious authority (it was *not* Christian), that light skin connotes moral purity, dark skin otherwise. It nauseates me even to type that. I don’t know where such an idea

came from, unless it was the mind of the devil. It's not what the "light and darkness" metaphor is about in the Bible.

Anyway, such nonsense has tainted the words "light" and "dark" so that for some they are hard to listen to. (And I know there are other, more complex reasons that I cannot properly unpack here, and which I perhaps do not truly understand. I can only acknowledge that they are there.)

Well, what can I say to this? I do not think we can well do without the many passages in the Bible that use the light and darkness metaphor. I can only beg people to try and see what a metaphor is really saying in its context. Imagine yourself, having lost your way at night in an unfamiliar neighborhood, inching along an unlit alley, not able to see your hand in front of your face, not knowing who might be hiding behind the trash cans. Then you reach a well-lit street and can tell where you are – you have come out of darkness into light. *That's* the sort of thing behind the metaphor in 1 Peter 2:9.

But this is written for a venue of Northern Great Lakes Synod of the ELCA. Given our location and ethnic make-up, chances are most readers will not have felt this difficulty. In fact, I anticipate another sort of difficulty – readers who will not *understand* the difficulty. I can imagine someone asking, perhaps with more than a hint of impatience, "Why can't people just see that a metaphor about the electromagnetic radiance kind of light and darkness is not talking about skin color?"

If that's you, I think I understand what you are thinking. Indeed, I share some of your bafflement. But let us be careful about quick judgements; let us take a listening stance (James 1:19). We are human beings and have blind spots. Who knows whether God's light may need to shine on us in some new way?

Let us pray: *We all stand in need – always – for your radiance, O God, to shine upon our incomplete understanding. Please open our eyes to see your Truth. Amen.*



Thursday, April 29, 2021

Text: John 3:19-21, NIV [2011] with some tweaking on the basis of the Greek text by DN

“This is the verdict [judgement]: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who is doing evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that their works have been done in God.”

The chief characteristic of judgment in the New Testament is that of showing things for what they are.

You may have heard about the wrath of God issuing in destruction, and that is certainly there. But I believe if you read carefully, you will find that the wrath is always against some sort of falsity in belief or behavior.

Truth must overcome the lie. To put it another way, if Truth is to prevail (and it shall), Truth must ultimately destroy what is false. If people persist in clinging to what is false, what they cling to will perish; if they will not let go of this in order to reach for the mercy of God – what else can happen but that they be lost? All, or at least most of the New Testament warnings about judgment come down to this.

My friend, do you love the light? Do you love the truth? What if the light, the truth, reveals something unsavory about you? Do you love it then?

Whenever we avoid the truth about ourselves, we are avoiding God. But when we come into the light, even when it exposes filth, this opens the way for grace. The four previous devotions made reference to God calling us “out of darkness into his marvelous light”. There are other ways to frame the same idea:

Out of pretense into humility.
Out of falsehood into truth.
Out of hiding into God’s embrace.
Out of our works into God’s grace.

The words at the start of this page come in just three verses – I think it’s forty-three words in the Greek original – after the most famous verse in the Bible about God’s love. Since it’s really true that “whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”, we can afford to come into the light. There is no need to fear our deeds being exposed – God’s grace covers that.

Let us pray: Lord we are tempted to hide away in the shadows, but the safest place is out in the open, in your light. Let even our filth be exposed, for you will be faithful to cleanse it. O God, may it be so that your light reveals this – that our works have been done in you. Amen.



Friday, April 30, 2021

Text: Psalm 36:9 NIV (2011)

**“With you is the fountain of life,
in your light we see light.”**

I'm thinking of one of the most radiant saints I've known. When she died, a younger friend shared the obituary notice on Facebook, adding words to this effect: "I've never met anyone who radiated joy as she did."

With this saint, as with others I've known, the radiance has come from drinking at the fountain of life – seeking nothing above the joy of knowing God. It also has come from trying to see everything in the light of God's radiance.

Living by this light can bring a pang with it. If we see more clearly because of God's light, we might for that very reason be able to see the folly of the world around us. And we cannot shrug this off, saying, "Oh, well, that's *their* problem." If the God of love is our source, we will channel the love of God. We cannot do this without feeling the world's hurt. Yet to do so is to embrace the privilege of sharing, in our small way, the nature of God. There can be no greater joy than that.

Let us pray: *With you is the fountain of life – teach us to drink there. In your light we see light – help us to see more clearly because of the rays of your love. Amen.*



Saturday, May 1, 2021

Text: John 1:5

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not understood it.”

[Note: Many translations say, “the darkness has not *overcome* it”. The meaning of the original Greek word is ambiguous. I believe we are to consider it both ways.]

Right now I am reading a secular book about marriage – or more precisely, about weddings. Each chapter is written by a different woman, and all the writers have a wedding story to tell. Some of the stories are funny, some poignant; some are meant to be happy, some sad. I am learning a lot about the way “people out there” think, though I admit that, with our rapidly changing social mores, a book from 2007 may be outdated.

We have the book because my wife picked it up some years ago on a whim at a library book sale. She read to page 168 and then quit (I know because her bookmark is still there). After I got to page 56, I asked her why. She struggled to answer, and after some back-and-forth, one thing we both agreed on is that “even the happy stories are sad.” For one thing, though some of the stories involve churches, all of them (at least as far as we’ve read) are godless.

In yesterday's devotion, I quoted the verse, "In your light, we see light." My wife and I are not judging the people in the book, but we think that having lived in God's light for a few decades, we see some things these writers don't. And it makes us sad for them.

Christians today are sometimes surprised at the paganism around us, but that would have never happened in the New Testament. If anything, the pagans were surprised at the Christians. "In all this they are surprised that you no longer run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you" (1 Peter 4:4 NASB). What fools us – if that's the word – is that many of us can still remember "Christendom". That is, we still remember the days when at least ostensibly, Christian ideals were considered dominant. That is emphatically no longer so, as the wedding book reveals.

This change has its upside: We don't need to waste energy trying to get the old days back. Let us rather address the world we actually live in, one in which, though the light shines in the darkness, the darkness has not understood it. Some advice from 1 Peter might help. He doesn't say to get all worked up, or to organize a rally, or to rant on Facebook. Rather, "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (1 Peter 3:15 NASB). That last word could be translated "respect" – I believe that's probably the writer's meaning. We don't need to cajole or badger; the fate of the world doesn't hang on our convincing others. But we are to be ready to give our reasons for hope in Christ, gently and respectfully.

Let us pray: *Help us to be ready to give an account of our hope in you – always with love, gentleness, and respect. Amen*

