

## Be a Light

Today's scripture comes from Ephesians 5:8-14. Listen now for how the Word of God is speaking to you in fresh and new ways this morning, "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. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

In the middle of the 24 hours news cycle and a life full of notifications, I believe that we need to remember our history as we look at the world around us. When we look at the lives around us with the lens of history, we can see where people of God throughout the arc of history have dealt with circumstances not so different than our own.

As a staff, we've been meeting daily to pray, study, connect, make decisions, film, and more. Garrett, our Music Minister mentioned how it had been about 100 years since the 1918 Influenza Pandemic. Almost 100 years to the date, we are going through similar decision that our faithful forefathers and foremothers had to make. In 1918, the Health Department came out and canceled all public meetings. People were in an uproar. And together, at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, Pastors from all over came together and made the decision to support the health department. They put out a statement in the DC's The Evening Star the following day, saying, "Resolved, in view of the prevailing condition of our city (the widespread prevalence of influenza, that has called forth the request from the District of Columbia Commissioners for the temporary closing of all churches) we, the Pastors' Federation, in special assembly, do place ourselves on record as cheerfully complying with the request of the Commissioners, which, we understand applies to all churches alike. We furthermore recommend that our people shall conduct in their own homes some form of religious worship remembering in prayer especially the sick, our allied nations at war and the present canvass for the fourth liberty loan." Always a comment on the capital campaign it seems, ha!

Gunton-Temple Presbyterian Church in Washington, DC put out this in the newspaper: "Inasmuch as it has seemed wise to the Commissioners of the District, after careful consideration of the question, to prohibit the gathering of the people on Sunday in their accustomed places of worship, may I suggest that at the usual hour of morning service you gather in your homes and unite in common prayer to the God of Nations and of families, that He will guide us in all wisdom in this time of trial, that our physicians and public officers may be led in their performance of duty and be strengthened by divine help, that the people may be wise and courageous, each in his place. Let us never forget that "Help cometh from the lord which made heaven and earth." Behold He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."

All of this is to say the following: we always think we are the first. We say that it must have been so much easier for people before so-and-so. But the Truth is that we are

not alone and the faithful have made these decisions before. There are people all over wondering how we will get through--and I understand that it is easy to be fearful when it seems as though there is no way forward--but the church has survived mass shut downs and home worship before. And we will do the same here.

Today's scripture calls us to be children of the light--surrounding ourselves with what is good and right and true. In a world that hoards groceries so there are none for the least of these, with leaders who pride themselves in falsities, and where there seems to be no capital t-ultimate Truths anymore, where can we find these things that are good and right and true?

Of course, there's the bible. It seems a little bit like the children's sunday school answer, but scripture is certainly where we can turn to for good and truthful things. Psalm 23 is somewhere that many of us turn to for comfort and to ground ourselves back in the things that matter when fear strikes ahold of us.

But I believe the place that we find good and right and true is standing right in front of us: each other. It's in the deacons who are calling up members of the congregation to check on them. It's in the countless members who have emailed the church asking where they can help. It's in the handful of our staff singers, who continue to show up and lead us in worship. It's in the faithfulness of doctors and nurses who do their best to help all, even with a lack of support or resources. It's in the kindness of grocery store workers and cashiers who put themselves in danger so that we can continue to eat. It's in the IT and computer folks who make connecting to one another easier in desperate and isolating times.

Good is in the face of neighbors who check on each other and politicians who fight for water to not be turned off and tenants to not be evicted. Moral decisions are being made all over our country and it is so easy to look at the negative. The mistakes of our leaders and the selfishness of hoarding is what makes the news and is the loudest. But kindness and good are here in the whisper of churches praying for one another and in the airwaves as we live stream worship. Listen for these voices, friends. And, when you can, amplify them instead of the screaming. Hold onto what is good. Even though we walk through the darkest of valleys, we shall have no fear for our God is with us.

The world needs our light more than ever before. In traditional Christianity, the world is broken up into two categories: the church and the world. The church is full of all things good, true, and light. The world is full of evil, trickery, and darkness. And we, as Christians, are called to put aside all of the "worldly" things to be the church. This is the heart of the Ephesians text. And while there are some problematic ideas in this dichotomy, I think there is power in the fact that it calls us to act better.

That is, Ephesians is arguing that, as Rev. Margaret Aymer of Austin Theological Seminary says, being a Christian in a non-Christian (or today a post-Christian) world should cause members of the church to act differently: to tell the truth, to push for justice, to uphold goodness regardless of the norms of the society at large. Members of the church

are to live as those who have already been raised from the dead in a world focused on prolonging youth and life.”

As children of the light, we should do what we walk in the way that we teach our littlest ones: let our lights shine. We believe that people should know that we are Christians by the stances we take, the justice we call for, the love we proclaim, and the light that we show even in the darkest of times.

Two weeks from now, April 4th, will mark 52 years since the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. MLK and this text call me to think about how we reacted as a white church to segregation and racism during the civil rights movement. They make me think about how a majority of our churches were violently silent in the face of injustice.

Dr. King was one who called the church to repent not only for the actions of those with evil intentions but for the "appalling silence of the good people." Who is affected when we do not live as children of the light? What injustices continue if we do not stand up to them? Where is God calling us to goodness, justice and truth-telling, not because it makes us good people and not to add to our resumes of being a "good ally" but because--if we don't--people will die.

A lot of us have a lot more time on our hands than ever before. Call the elders. Call your politicians. Call on goodness and justice and truth and call on God. Amen.