

Lent 4 – March 19, 2023

Text: Ephesians 5:8-14

Theme: This Little Gospel Light of Mine

I love the old hymns because they are so rich in theology and their poetry is amazing. “Mighty Fortress,” “Wake Awake,” “I Know the My Redeemer Lives,” are all a wealth of theology that we sing and we know we are right because we are singing back to God what he has first said to us in His Holy Word. However, there is also something to be said for the simple songs. Sometimes we just cannot beat the theology of “Jesus Loves Me.” What more needs to be said?

Another of the simple songs that I love and I have sung with generations of preschoolers is “This Little Gospel Light of Mine.” Also known as “This Little Light of Mine,” it is a song of unknown origin that arose in America in the early part of the 20th century. Many think of it as a Negro Spiritual but it has had greater impact than just a typical spiritual. It has been a song of Christians who are standing in the face of all kinds of oppression and sin. It has helped light dark places and push back evil.

Think about these texts we have before us today. The Old Testament reading from Isaiah says “I will turn the darkness before them into light.” In Ephesians, Paul says, “...for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of

light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true),and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.” And In the Gospel according to John, Jesus says, “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” All the readings center around darkness and light.

Remember that darkness is not anything in and of itself. It is only the absence of light. You know how much difference even a small candle can make in a completely dark room. I never think my watch is very bright until I roll over in my sleep and it flashes on in front of my face and suddenly there is this blinding light shining into my eyes. When we bring Christ into any situation, we are bringing light into darkness and that is exactly what St. Paul is encouraging the Ephesians to do.

They say that the last couple of lines of our Epistle are from a well know song of the time.

***“Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”***

I kind of wonder if this was one of those simple songs of the day that all the people knew like “This Little Gospel Light of Mine.” The way St. Paul uses it makes me think it was well known. And it

says everything that the Ephesians need to know. Like any pastor, Paul is concerned about the influence the outside world is having on his people. They are most attentive in worship but then they go off in the world where there are Roman brothels and temples to false gods and remember that some of the temples and brothels were combos. There is superstition and black magic and people of this time were not even skeptical of such things. Then there were dozens of preachers out there trying to get them to believe another gospel, ones that no doubt would line their own wallets. Paul tells them,

"...for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord."

He says the same thing to us. We too are baptized children of God. Once we lived in darkness but as soon as we were baptized, the light of Christ became a blazing fire in our souls and now we are enabled to walk as children of the light. Not only that, but we are enabled to do what light does...we are enabled to expose darkness by our very presence.

As Satan tries to expand his darkness in the world, we expose it to light and push it back just by the way we live our lives.

Remember that darkness is not anything of itself. The only way it

can thrive and prosper is for us to cover our light. "Won't put it under a bushel, oh no! I'm gonna let it shine." The only way darkness can win is if Satan somehow snuffs out our light by leading us down paths that lead to him instead of God. "Won't let Satan whoosh it out! I'm gonna let it shine!"

There are a great many programs on how to evangelize or how to disciple other people, but evangelism and discipleship are just fancy words for bringing light to the darkness. We don't need a manual on how to defeat Satan or how to lighten the darkness in the world around us. We are just who and what we are, and we are unafraid to be who God has made us. We reflect the blazing light of God.

Of course, be prepared, because being light will really irritate people who think that they like walking in darkness. Have you ever received a post on Facebook that states something that is categorically opposed to God's Word and the person posting it threatens you with, "If you say anything negative, I will block you!" Those "oh so tolerant" people are not very tolerant, are they? They only tolerate darkness and become angry at light. But see, that's the thing. I don't hold them too responsible for their ignorance and silliness because they are in darkness, and darkness cannot be tolerant of light. Light destroys darkness just by being present. As

long as they can keep God's light under a bushel, they can lie to themselves and say that dark is light, bad is good, and down is up, but once God's light shines on them, all is lost for them. It is really very sad. There is not much we can do about it except not take it personally.

Don't get angry about Facebook posts and offhanded comments, and definitely don't allow your anger to turn to sin. Try to understand that they are only trying to preserve their very fragile glass house in which they have hidden themselves with their sin. However, we, the children of God, cannot allow such people to deter us.

St. Paul calls us.

***"Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you."***

All we can do is awake and shine with the same light that Christ has shined on us. How could we do otherwise? It is what we were created to do. Like an apple tree bears apples, so we bear light. Never be ashamed of being who God has made you to be and doing what God has created you to do. Those in the light will love you for it and those in darkness will probably hate you, but God will be glorified by you.