**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

**“Children of Light”**

Pastor Aaron Reseburg

August 18th, 2024

Ephesians 5:6-21

A few years ago, a friend and I were about to climb a mountain. We had hiked pretty far just to get to the base of the mountain. We pitched our tent and decided we would attack the mountain early in the morning. I think we woke up around 3:45 the next morning to eat a little breakfast and begin long before the sun rose. Due to some snow related problems, we had to make most of the mountain before noon. As we began to pack early that morning, I realized I had forgotten something very important: my headlamp. It was pitch black, you couldn’t see anything, and the first part of the trip would be through a boulder field. One miss-step could lead to a broken ankle or worse. Without the light from my headlamp, I couldn’t have gotten far, and could have even fallen off a cliff.

The world we live in today is a lot like that boulder field. It’s dark out there, and you can’t see where you’re going. Obviously, I don’t mean it’s literally dark out there, but for as light as it is at noon on a summer’s day, it may as well be 3:00 AM when it comes to looking ahead of us. Life is unpredictable; you may think you have a clear plan for your life, for your family, for your career, only to step in a hole and have all your plans fall apart.

It's a dark world, and it feels at times like we are just inching our way along in a dark hallway, terrified of falling down the stairs. People respond to this fear in lots of different ways.

There are those who live their lives in fear, desperately grasping at any kind of control that they can find. This has certainly been exasperated by Covid, with people avoiding anything that might possibly make them sick. Some seek to gain control with strict rules, for themselves or their families. Some allow their fear to consume them, and so they fall into despair. The darkness and unpredictability of this world leads them to cope with drugs, alcohol, sex, pornography, or anything else to numb the despair. The truth is that we all at different times live our lives in fear, and we have all reacted in one of these ways at some point.

There are some who go the opposite way; in the face of a dark world, they embrace it. In a dark world, it’s easy to hide what you do. A thought, a sin no one sees, a sin one person sees, a sin far away from home, a sin around people who don’t care: it’s easy to hide in the dark. We have all hidden sins in the dark.

The world is as dangerous as it is dark. On the cross, Christ took the punishment for the sins of the whole world. But there are still earthly consequences to sin. Sin can hurt a marriage; it can tear a family apart. Sin can hurt your reputation; sin can do real and lasting damage. Sin can even hurt your body; sexually transmitted infections, alcoholism, drug abuse, mistakes made while being intoxicated, over-eating, all of those things and more can and will hurt you. Forgiveness is offered to those who repent, but the consequences of sin still remain.

Not only can sin hurt you, but it can hurt those around you. Sin begets more sin; your sin can lead others to sin. It can lead others to judge, to hate, to hold grudges. When sins done in the dark are brought into the light but there are no consequences, no public pronouncement of sin, it can lead other people to fall into the same sin.

We live in a dangerous and dark world. There are people all around us who are falling into gaps in the rocks: people who are making mistakes, living lives of sin, people who are running around in the dark and are hurting themselves and others. The world needs light, we need light, we need to see where we are going.

My friend did not forget his headlamp and so early in the morning, we slowly made our way through the boulder field. He would lead the way and find the path, then turn around and use his light to show me where to go. Without him, I would have just given up and turned around with no hope of making it.

We need light in this dark world. The world and our culture would tell you to look inside of yourself, to follow your heart, to find the light inside of you and trust that to lead you. If you want to give your children good advice, don’t tell them to follow their hearts. Our hearts are just as dark as the rest of us.

Our hearts are infected with sin and following them will only lead to more sin. Your sinful self doesn’t want you to find the light, it doesn’t want you to be safe. Your sinful self loves the darkness, and the old Adam inside of you would like nothing more than to lead you right off a cliff. So, don’t follow your heart. Follow Christ. He is the light of the world, the light no darkness can overcome.

Put all your faith and your trust in Him. Don’t walk fearfully waiting for the steps to come; walk confidently trusting that Christ will protect you and that He will lead you. Turn away from your fear, your pride, your guilt, your greed, your lust and anything else that is keeping you in the dark and turn to Him and Him alone. Throw the sins that you do in the darkness into the light of Christ, at the foot of His cross, and watch as they disappear. He will lead you where you need to go. Through the light of His Word, He will direct your paths.

They won’t be easy paths, the world is still dangerous in the light, but He will point out every hole, every gap, every crack, and every cliff. If you put your hope in Christ who is the light of the world, He will guide you through this life and bring you to new life in the resurrection.

What’s more is that if you follow the light, if you follow Christ, you will begin to reflect His light. You will be like my friend guiding me through the boulder field. If you immerse yourself in His Word, you will be able to help those around you as they traverse the same paths. In your baptisms, Christ has made you children of the light. Reflect His light into the world because that’s what the world needs most. It’s what your unbelieving neighbor, family member, friend, or co-worker needs more than anything else. They need the light that comes only from the truth of Jesus.

It's what we teach the children in our school; it’s the whole reason we have a school. It isn’t to make sure all kids are educated and are able to succeed in high school and college. The reason we have a school is to teach the children that have been entrusted to us the truth. The whole truth, not a vague truth or a partial truth, but the whole truth which we confess as a church that subscribes unconditionally to the Book of Concord. To give them light in a dark and dangerous world. To teach them the way in which they should go. To teach them what sin is and what Jesus has done about it. That’s our purpose; everything else is just icing on the cake.

You all participate in that purpose just by giving an offering, attending a fundraiser, sitting in a board meeting, praying for our teachers and students, volunteering to help a child read, installing a phone, painting a room, and many other ways.

God has given you many vocations, but your purpose in each of your vocations is to do the same: to spread the light of His truth. To be children of the light. That’s why God has given you children, parents, brothers and sisters, coworkers, customers, bosses, and yes, even annoying neighbors. You are to walk in the light of Christ so that you can shine His light in a dark world.

Our world seems to be pretty dark these days, but don’t despair; darknesses’ days are numbered. Dawn is coming, the light is coming. Jesus Christ has ascended into heaven, but He is not going to stay there. One day, He will return and bring all of heaven with Him. On that day, there will be no darkness, no danger, no unpredictability. On that day, the dead will be raised and those who have put their faith and hope in the light will be raised to eternal life.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.