Proper 16 • Ephesians 5:22–33

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Christian love, our duty is to expose the deeds of darkness done by our own brothers and sisters in the faith. We confront one another in our sin, always with the goal of winning our brother or sister over and proclaiming Christ’s forgiveness.

Secondly, walking as children of light, we expose the deeds of darkness in the world. As the light of Christ shines upon the ungodly, we see the true nature of their deeds—death. It is our prayer that as the light of Christ shines on them, their eyes may be opened to this as well.

Paul concludes with what is most likely a stanza from an early Christian hymn. It proclaims the truth of what has taken place for the believer—a resurrection or an awakening by the light of the gospel. This is our prayer each and every day, as each day we awake anew with the light of Christ shining on us. Each day we awake in the grace of our baptism. Each day is a resurrection from death, a rescue from the deeds of darkness, a deliverance from the clutches of the evil one. This is also our prayer for unbelievers, that the light of Christ would awaken them, expose their deeds of darkness, and make them fellow children of light. Just as it is the light that produces fruit in our lives, so it is the light of Christ, the gospel, that enlightens the unbeliever and calls him to faith and a life of good works. To walk as children of light is to walk in the power of the word made flesh, the lamp for our feet and the light for our path, who shines upon us with his grace.

A sermon on this text could build on the theme (taken from verse 14): “A Wakeup Call.” There is ample material in the text to proclaim the dangers of drifting back to the darkness of sin and death as well as the blessing of the light of Christ. Rather than the darkness of sin, our Lord calls us to the darkness of Good Friday, through which we receive the light of his forgiveness won on the cross. Through baptism we are children of the light, bearing the fruit of goodness, righteousness, and truth, exposing the deeds of darkness in our own lives, in the lives of fellow believers, and in the lives of the lost.

Joel P. Fritsche

Proper 16 • Ephesians 5:22–33 • August 23, 2015

Marriage. A man and a woman united. The standard for this union has been established by God and is fully rooted in his love for us in Jesus Christ.

A quick review of the readings from Ephesians for the prior two Sundays will frame our reading for today; we are imitators of Christ and his love. Ephesians 5 continues to draw us away from partnering ourselves with “the sons of disobedience” and has us “walk as children of light” while discerning “what is pleasing to God.” Now, as we move into Ephesians 5:22–33, we are invited to look more closely, to drill down, and consider very specifically how to incorporate the previous verses into the model for loving one another as imitators of Christ.

For most of us, it’s important to acknowledge that we and so many others hit a
major barrier simply by reading the word “submit.” Is this really new with our generation? Given that this was written when marriages were arranged, it’s doubtful that this message was received any more easily by the people in Ephesus. It’s imperative that we not stop here but continue on to see the wonderful relationship established by God with each of us and how that has a direct impact on every other relationship.

The bulk of this passage has as its focus the role of husbands and how they are to love (v. 25ff). “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” Here’s where the weight on the shoulders of the husband grows heavier all the way to the point of it being impossible to carry. In verse 28, the obligation is for the husband to love his wife not only for a moment but as a binding and lasting obligation. This means that it is unacceptable for a husband to love to the best of his ability and call it good. Rather, he is to love as Christ loves the church (v. 29). This love Christ has for the church is both a profound mystery and an impossible standard for any husband to meet.

In taking this message to people, it would be wrong to soft pedal the clear message we have about the relationship between a woman and a man. Even the most wonderful husband is an imitator, not Christ himself. As an imitator, the husband is going to fall far short of the standard set by Christ. All husbands will not only fall short here but in every aspect of their lives and must receive forgiveness and be fortified by the means of grace. Our imitation is imperfect but we still reflect the love given to us. How blessed is the woman who sees the reflection of Christ in the man to whom she is married. How blessed are we, in all of our Christian relationships, to see the love of Christ in our brothers and sisters, the body of Christ.

In the Broadway musical *Les Miserables*, we watch the life of Jean Valjean as he is freed from prison and struggles to reinvent himself and spend the rest of his life keeping a promise to love an orphan girl as his own. As the end of the show arrives, we find Valjean dying and being greeted by the ghosts of the child’s mother, Fantine, and that of another character, Eponine. The epilogue carries with it a message of love, relationships, and forgiveness. Now, in death, Valjean, Fantine, and Eponine join in singing:

- And remember
- The truth that once was spoken
- To love another person
- Is to see the face of God.

*Proper 17 • Ephesians 6:10–20 • August 30, 2015*

The image of the Christian as warrior has become more distasteful in recent years. War-weary people cringe at the classic battle hymns, fearing hymns like “Onward Christian Soldiers” create images of militaristic aggression that don’t fit with the gospel