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Proper 15 • Ephesians 5:6–21

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Proper 15 • Ephesians 5:6–21 • August 16, 2015

This epistle reading turns our attention toward living the Christian life. It builds off the foundation that St. Paul laid earlier in Ephesians, namely 2:8–9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Now we can freely do the works that we are created in Christ Jesus to do.

Even though most of the text is exhortation to good works, notice that Paul’s appeal is not compulsion by the law. It is a gospel appeal: “At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord” (5:8). Also, Paul does not merely indicate that one is lost in darkness before conversion, even though that is certainly true. That person is darkness itself. One’s very essence and being is sin. The gospel enlightens darkness. It turns darkness into light. In the office of Evening Prayer we sing, “Jesus Christ is the light of the world, the light no darkness can overcome.” He is the life and light of every man (Jn 1:4). To be light “in the Lord” implies relationship, a connection to Christ and his forgiveness. It is his light that produces light in the lives of God’s children. Therefore, even the works we do are not done by us, but by him.

For Christians, the temptation is always to revert to darkness. We live in the midst of those who cut themselves off from the light, who continually live in darkness. Darkness cannot produce fruit. Those who cut themselves off from Christ cannot produce good works. Even the works they do, what the world would call “good,” are sin. Association with darkness is clearly harmful, even detrimental to the Christian. How often do we take part in the unfruitful deeds of darkness? How often do we find ourselves doing shameful things when we cut ourselves off from the light, Jesus Christ, and from our fellow believers? In his first epistle, John says, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin” (1:7). Our fellowship with the Lord Jesus, and our fellowship with one another, is clearly important in our walk as children of the light.

Walking together as children of light is a critical witness to the light, Jesus Christ, in this world of darkness. In chapter 4 Paul rejoiced in the unity we have as believers in the body of Christ. Together we are strong, not easily tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, not easily pulled back into the darkness. First and foremost, in

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.