

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Second Sunday in Lent, February 24, 2013

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 8, 60:1-3, 498:1-4, 367, 20

Lessons: Psalm 14, Romans 2: 9-16, John 1:1-14.

Sermon Text: John 3:19-21

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Last week you heard that ***“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.”*** (John 3:16-18)

Now Jesus goes on and tells us: ***“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”***

Today, let's look at

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN LIGHT AND DARKNESS

1. **Light has come into the world through Jesus Christ**
2. ***“But men loved darkness instead of light.”***
3. ***“Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light,”***

Jesus brings light into the world. He is the one of whom Simeon said as he held the infant Jesus in his arms in the temple ***“A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.”*** (Luke 2:31-32 King James Version)

In the first chapter of John's Gospel, God told us that the darkness, that is, unconverted mankind by nature, does not understand God's light. Here God tells us that unconverted men – mankind by nature, ***“loved darkness instead of light”*** and gives the reason: ***“because their deeds were evil.”***

Jesus himself tells us in John 8:12: ***“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”***

The true Light, Jesus the Savior, has come into the world, and is now present before the eyes of men. Jesus was with Nicodemus in our text, and he is present just as truly now, in his Gospel.

We see here again that struggle between light and darkness. Those who do evil things in secret are afraid their deeds will be exposed.

“This is the verdict” John says, the verdict Christ proclaims: ***“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son”*** (John 3:18).

“Light has come into the world.” It has come. It came bodily with Jesus, the very Son of God. It came in promise and hope with the words of God to Eve and Adam which were directed toward Satan, the evil serpent: ***“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*** (Genesis 3:15)

“But men loved darkness instead of light.” That is always the case of man by nature. Even Christians have that sinful flesh which makes us want to ‘get away with something.’ In darkness we are not reproached or admonished because everyone else in darkness is doing the same things.

“Because their deeds were evil.” No one’s deeds, by nature, are good. In a parallel to our Old Testament lesson we read from Psalm 53:2-3 **“God looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. Everyone has turned away, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.”**

Make no mistake. People bring the verdict down on themselves by rejecting the light that Jesus brought into this world. Very early in his gospel John wrote: **“The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.”** (John 1:9)

The words love and hate tell us why unbelievers come under judgment. They LOVE the darkness and HATE the light. Unbelievers love the darkness and the evil deeds associated with darkness. The light exposes their wicked ways. It reveals sin for what it really is – disobedience and defiance of God. They hate the light. We see the results in evil deeds, often done openly and defended vigorously. **“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”** (Galatians 5:19-21) These things and a host of other sins attract unbelievers more than Christ. They hate him because he opposes what they love.

John emphasizes that idea as he goes on: **“Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.”** This is the way it actually is. When and where do wicked deeds occur? It is most often in secret and in darkness. Even authorities today recognize that there is less crime on well-lighted streets and property. Well-lit places discourage crime. Evil, wicked things happen in the dark, in secret, away from the light and away from places where others can see them. And I think we are all familiar with the picture of evil schemes by groups of people being planned in secret, behind closed doors.

But the majority of men did not, and still does not, pass the test of belief, of faith in the Savior. They find no pleasure in the Light. They find no pleasure in the light of His Gospel. They prefer the darkness of sin and unbelief. They have no love for the light and for the Author of light. They want nothing to do with Jesus the Savior. Their sin becomes no longer the result of ignorance, but of deliberate choice and preference. Their whole life and their works are evil. They are the results of their love of darkness and its deeds. They are offered light, but they prefer to remain in darkness; they are offered salvation, but they prefer damnation.

How can we say such things of men? Because God’s Word says it. We cannot look into the hearts of others, and those who do not believe have nothing but wicked hearts. Deeds that are considered genuine good works in God’s sight are totally foreign to them. Oh, yes, they may be nice people, good neighbors, and highly thought of. Oh yes, they may do things that the world regards or thinks of as ‘good’, but in God’s sight, what is really a good work?

You learned from the catechism that good works are everything that a believing child of God does in the fear, love, and trust of God. Here is the character of a good work: it is done in God, in communion with him by faith. Our works are then good, and will bear the test, when the will of God is guiding them and the glory of God is the goal of them. When they are done in God’s strength, and for his sake, to him, then they shall even be a blessing to others, as we read in 1 Peter 2:12: **“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”**

The unbelievers hate the light because their works are morally rotten and they will not bear exposure. They shun the light of God’s Word with all their might. They fear the revelation of their sinful, shameful, ugly, vulgar deeds and the subsequent reproof, disapproval, and criticism from God’s Word. They want to continue their wicked activity in darkness, where they think that nothing of the light from God can reach them.

How sad it is that men prefer their sin and its deeds even now, when Jesus has come to bring them deliverance from the bondage of sin. This is a terribly strong warning not to submit to the tyranny of sin, not to serve sin in any form.

The true reason why men love darkness rather than light is because their deeds are evil. They love darkness because they think it is a cover and an excuse for their evil deeds, and they hate the light because it robs them of the good opinion they had of themselves, by showing them their sinfulness and misery.

This is the condemnation, this is what ruins souls, that they shut their eyes against the light, and against Christ and his gospel. They do not desire the knowledge of his ways, in fact, as we read in Job 21:14-15: ***“Yet they say to God, ‘Leave us alone! We have no desire to know your ways. Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him? What would we gain by praying to him?’”***

BUT – and here, by the grace of God, is the case of all in whom the Holy Spirit has worked faith: ***“But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”*** This is what the child of God seeks to do.

In contrast to unbelievers, one who follows the truth, who performs the deeds of truth, who lives in accordance with the demands of purity, honesty, integrity, who does the works that flow from a regenerated heart, such a one comes to the light. He is glad to have his works revealed in order that they may speak for him. For they are in reality not his own, nor are they done for his own glorification, but they are done and performed in God. ***“For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”*** (Philippians 2:13)

Those are truly good works which are done in communion with God. The strength, the ability to do them must be found in God and must come from God.

It is impossible for an unregenerate person, for an unbeliever, to perform good works. Truly good works can be done only by him in whom the Lord has kindled faith, who lives in and with God.

Those who seek to intend and act honestly do not dread the scrutiny of the light, but rather desire to come to the light. We are talking about the Gospel light. Just as it convicts and terrifies evildoers, so it comforts and strengthens those who walk in the ways of the Lord. A ‘good person’ is one who has been justified by God AND seeks to live a life of sanctification. What is the character of a good man? He is one who does the truth; he ***“lives by the truth”***; that is, he acts truly and sincerely in all he does. Though sometimes he comes short of doing good, the good he would do, yet he lives by the truth, he seeks to live honestly. He has his infirmities, for sin is always with us, but he holds fast his integrity, seeking every day, all day, to serve God and his neighbor. He seeks to live as did Paul, of whom we read: ***“Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace.”*** (2 Corinthians 1:12) With the Psalmist he gladly says: ***“Test me, O LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind.”*** (Psalm 26:2 New International Version) ***“Examine me, O LORD, and prove me.”*** (Psalm 26:2 King James Version)

He wants to know what the will of God is, and resolves to do it, though it be ever so contrary to his own will and interest.

Those who believe in Jesus live in the truth. The light shines on, in, and through them. Drawn to Jesus, they do works that show the presence of God in their lives. To do this requires beating down the flesh, and standing up to forces of evil. The one who lives by the truth comes into the light. In this way he or she witnesses to Christ and the truth of the Gospel. All this involves God working through him. We have been justified by faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit has sanctified us, that is, he has lead believers to hate sin and be eager to live a holy life filled with good works. God has given us grace to live in the light. May we always, every day, seek to serve God and our neighbor!

“Thou fountain whence all wisdom flows
Which God on pious hearts bestows,
Grant us Thy consolation
That in our pure faith's unity
We faithful witnesses may be
Of grace that brings salvation.
Hear us, Cheer us By Thy teaching; Let our preaching
And our labor Praise Thee, Lord, and serve our neighbor.” Amen.
(The Lutheran Hymnal 235:3)