

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Third Sunday after Trinity, July 6, 2014

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

Hymns: 16, 132:1, 539, 550:1-3, 421.

Lessons: Isaiah 60:1-20, Ephesians 5: 8-17, John 3:16-21.

Sermon Text: 1 John 1:5-10

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We take light for granted. At the flick of a switch we can usually have all the light we want. Mankind has nearly covered all the inhabited lands of the earth with artificial light. In fact, it is extremely difficult to find a place on earth where there is complete, total natural darkness, allowing you to see all the visible stars at night.

But mankind can't live without light. Have you ever been in a cave when the guide had you sit down, cover all your artificial sources of light such as a glowing watch dial or a cell phone and turned off the lights? Total, absolute darkness.

Even if you are not in a cave and you shut your eyes for five minutes you can still see a glow of light. If you then also covered your eyes, you might have some idea of darkness. And then when we open our eyes, we would be disoriented for a few minutes.

Even at night outdoors we have the stars and the moon to help give us light. If the sky is totally cloudy, and you are far away from man-made light, you may experience a sort of darkness.

If you have experienced such darkness, you may even have realized how scary darkness can be.

Peter tells us in the Scriptures: *"you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."* (1 Peter 2:9) We have been called out of darkness, the darkness of sin, into God's marvelous light.

Today John emphasizes that

GOD IS LIGHT

- 1. Because he is Light, there is no darkness in him at all.**
- 2. If we claim to be sinless, we lie and deceive ourselves and make God a liar.**
- 3. If we walk in light and confess our sins, the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.**

John restates his credentials and reminds us again where he gets his authority: *"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you."* John didn't make up this message he is delivering. It isn't just his words and his opinion. This is the message which he and the other eyewitnesses heard from Jesus himself, the very Son of God, as we also read in Hebrews: *"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe."* (Hebrews 1:1-2)

John assures us: *"God is light; in him there is no darkness at all."* He shows that walking in the light involves fellowship with God and with our Christian brothers and sisters.

When God first created the heavens and the earth *"the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep."* (Genesis 1:2) There was no light. That hadn't been created yet. When God created light we read *"And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning--the first day."* (Genesis 1:3-5)

Sometimes it doesn't take much light to make a difference. When you are out camping in the dark woods, a candle, or one little flashlight, or a small campfire can make a great difference between darkness and light. In God we have much more light. God created all light, and John tells us *"God is light."*

Darkness is the opposite of light, and that is the way Satan, the devil, and all his evil deeds and evil powers are portrayed: as darkness. When Jesus was seized in the Garden of Gethsemane he told his captors

“this is your hour – when darkness reigns.” (Luke 22:53) Jesus told Paul when he called him that he was sending him especially to the Gentiles ***“to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”*** (Acts 26:18) When we are told to put on the whole armor of God in Ephesians, this is because we Christians fight ***“against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”*** (Ephesians 6:12)

But God, our God, is light, and he has called us into the light! He has delivered us from the power of darkness, as we read in Colossians 1:13: ***“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,”***

John wrote this letter at a time when artificial light was nowhere near as universal or as convenient as it is today. Even in John’s day, light was associated with purity, goodness, holiness and excellence. Even in many pagan religions light was good and darkness was bad.

In our Old Testament lesson you heard the prophecy of the coming of the Savior and the ultimate light he would bring. That will finally be completely fulfilled in heaven. ***“The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end.”*** (Isaiah 60:19-20)

In the last chapters of the book of Revelation we have the picture of the holy Jerusalem, that is, heaven, as a place with no night and no darkness. ***“There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light.”*** (Revelation 22:5)

Because God is light, everything that is darkness is excluded from fellowship with God. ***“In him there is no darkness at all.”*** Scripture asks ***“what fellowship can light have with darkness?”*** (2 Corinthians 6:14)

John then presents three parallel warning ideas showing how our sins condemn us, using the form and logic of “If this is true, then that follows.”

“If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, [then] we lie and do not live by the truth.” That is a terrible indictment of hypocrisy. If anyone claims to be a follower of Christ but walks in the darkness of sin, that person is a liar. John doesn’t waste words or use euphemisms or soft-pedal sin. There is no varnishing the truth, no hemming and hawing. He calls a liar a liar. God’s conclusion regarding the conduct and life of Christians is that if we live and walk in darkness, we are liars and are not living the truth.

He has just told us that we have fellowship with God as our heavenly Father by faith. But he follows up and emphasizes that if we who profess to be Christians live and behave ourselves as though we were still in darkness; if we are addicted to sin; if we in any way serve sin and corruption, then our entire life is a lie. We may deceive ourselves – and some people some of the time – but the lie is there nevertheless. We are then not doing, not practicing the truth, which demands that we live a pure and holy life, according to the will of our heavenly Father. To walk and live in sins while professing to be children of God is to brand ourselves as liars and hypocrites.

Here is the second warning idea: ***“If we claim to be without sin, [then] we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.*** John here is talking about the heresy of perfectionism, the idea which is held by many people to this day, namely, that they can attain to such a perfect state in this world that they are completely free from sin. John is appalled at the mere suggestion of such blasphemy. There is no such thing as perfect sanctification in this life. If there were, that would make the forgiveness of sins unnecessary for us. If any one should hold this foolish notion and even confess it, he is deceiving himself; he is leading himself astray; he is abandoning the eternal truth as revealed in the Word of God. He is denying the truth that all men have sinned and come short of the glory of God, (Romans 6:23) that there is none who does good, no, not one. (Psalm 14:1-3) Anyone who claims these things has abandoned the truth that we sinners are justified before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith. Such a person is lost in the blindness of self-righteousness; he has lost fellowship with God and with Jesus Christ, his Savior.

John expands on that idea in his third warning ***“If we claim we have not sinned, [then] we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.”*** Not only are we liars, but we make God to be a liar; we claim that God is a liar. God’s Word is not in us.

If any person who is at all acquainted with the Word of God is so blind and perverse as to deny his own sinfulness, he is stifling the voice of his conscience and he is setting aside the entire Word of God, both Law and Gospel. In fact, he is rejecting the entire experience of mankind. The entire content of God's Word may be summarized in the two words, sin and grace.

Every Christian must vigilantly guard against such a delusion, and to that end make the study of God's Word a daily practice. Then his own sin will be revealed to him, but above all the greatness of God's mercy will be revealed to him again and again.

But just as John gives us three warnings, so we have two "If this is true, then that follows" statements to encourage children of God and to lead into the next chapter and our next sermon.

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, [then] we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." John describes the conduct of the Christians as it should be: But if we walk in the light as God himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sin. We are a light in the Lord through faith, and therefore it behooves us, that is, it is necessary and proper, to walk as children of light, as you heard in our Epistle lesson: ***"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)"*** (Ephesians 5:8-9)

God, our heavenly Father, is in the light, for he is light. His entire essence is holiness. Everything that he does is pure and holy. By faith we share this nature and our conduct should give evidence of the faith that has made us children of the light and enables us to walk as the children of light, according to God's good pleasure and will.

If we thus live a holy and righteous life, deriving continual light, power, and life from him, then there will be joyful consequences of such behavior. In the first place, we have the assurance that we have fellowship with one another. Just as we are closely connected with our heavenly Father by faith; so we are united with the holy apostles and with Christians of all times by the bond of this same faith. Just as an unholy, sinful life, a conduct of sin and shame, excludes one from all communion with the saints of God and with God Himself, so a righteous and holy life, lived by the power of God through faith, binds us ever more closely to the Lord and to one another. At the same time we are also assured that the blood of Jesus, our Savior, the Son of God, cleanses us from all sin. In spite of the weaknesses and imperfections of this earthly life, in spite of the many accusations and temptations on the part of the devil and the people of this world, we have forgiveness of sins. Jesus, the true Man, our brother according to the flesh, but at the same time the Son of God, the eternal God Himself, has shed his blood for us once, yet his sacrifice is eternally powerful by virtue of that mysterious, wonderful personal union of the two natures. Always, every day, without ceasing, we have forgiveness of sins, we are righteous and just and holy before God through the blood of Jesus Christ, which is always effective. In the case of every sin we have forgiveness, which is always offered and transmitted to us in the Word and in the Sacrament and accepted by us in faith.

And John assures us ***"If we confess our sins, [then] he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."*** That is the way of Christians, to bring their transgressions before their heavenly Father in contrition and repentance, to confess them all without excuse. We can do that so freely because we know that God is reconciled to us through the blood of his Son. He forgives us our sins for the sake of Christ. He cleanses us from all our imperfections and unrighteousnesses, from the sins which still cling to us and hinder us in the fulfillment of God's will. He can and does do this because the righteousness of Christ is sufficient to outweigh all our trespasses. His atonement is great enough to cover all our sins. Our heavenly Father is faithful and just. He has accepted the redemption of Christ as full payment for all sin of all mankind. He has accepted the work of Jesus Christ, his Only-Begotten Son as the perfect reconciliation for all sin.

So God is light, and if we claim to be in him, to have fellowship with him but walk in darkness, we are liars. But we have this confidence, the most important thing ever: ***"and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."*** We must rely on the blood of Jesus in his sufferings and death, and not on ourselves.

The light of God isn't just a puny flashlight with its batteries almost dead. It is a mega-quadrillion-watt light shining in our lives. May we always walk in that floodlight of God's light! Amen.