

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Eighteenth Sunday After Trinity, October 8, 2023

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

Hymns: 284, 294:1, 285, 297, 291.

Lessons: Proverbs 6:20-23, 2 Peter 1:16-21, John 1:1-14.

Sermon Text: Psalm 119:105.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

If you have ever been walking in the dark along a rough path, you probably had a light. If you had a flashlight, it would only shine light where you pointed it. Surely you wouldn't be walking on a rough path and shining the flashlight all around you and up into the trees. You would shine it on the path in front of you so you could see where you are going.

That is the very picture God provides for us when we read that his *“word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”*

Just as you need a light when you walk a difficult path, so you need something to guide you in life. Without a guide in life, we would just meander, get lost and probably go dangerous places where we shouldn't be, and do dangerous things. Today we ask

WHAT GUIDES US?

- 1. How much do you need light?**
- 2. How much do you need God?**
- 3. God's Word is the best possible guide.**

Light is a great part of our lives. Can you imagine not having any artificial light? It has happened that our churches have lost electric power for a short time during worship services. If those things had happened at night during our worship service and been a longer power outage, we might have had opportunity to panic.

In our world today, it would seem that we just could not function without the artificial light we have available to us. Darkness can be very uncomfortable. Some of you may have experienced such darkness while camping, particularly in a wilderness area. This is why you are so glad to have a lamp or a light. It illuminates where the feet are stepping, and it shows the path ahead. You don't want to put your foot on a rock or root upon which you might sprain your ankle or over which you might trip and fall.

And without light – natural light or artificial light, we would be unable to go very far in the dark without getting into difficulty. If we had only natural light, the sun, the moon and the stars, we would probably only function successfully and move about and be about our work in daylight hours. Oh, yes, when we have a bright moon, which might be about half of each month if it isn't cloudy out, we might be able to function at night, too. If the way were a well-known path, a light might not be needed. Sometimes, the light of the moon will be sufficient to guide someone who's traveling along a familiar pathway, even if it is narrow.

But during the time the Bible was being written, artificial light would have come from torches, candles, simple oil lamps or a lantern. In fact, some Bible scholars speak of sandals which had a lamp or flame on the toes of sandals so that people could have light for each step they took, which is the very picture of our text.

This Bible verse suggests that the traveler is walking an unknown path in the dark.

But today we are talking about a special light. It is the light from God's Word. And we really have two kinds of light from God's Word: Law and Gospel. Let's look at the blessings of having such light.

In the Old Testament, and especially in the Psalms, the word translated “law” is the word “Torah”. It means instruction. It is not limited to commands, but includes all of God’s word, both law and gospel. The word “Word” in our text is a general term for everything God has spoken. ***“Thy Word is Truth.”***

If we didn’t have God’s law, we would live in a terrible world. If we didn’t have God’s law to show mankind standards of right and wrong, we would live in a terrible world. We would live in a world of practically complete lawlessness and violence. Any standards of right and wrong would be totally decided by what each individual thinks is best for him or her. And law is just part of that Word of God. But Christians also recognize that God’s law also is a light for our path when it guides us in Christian living. We speak of this as the third use or purpose of the law, God’s law as a guide, a guideline, a straight-edge to show us which way to go.

The other kind of light is the Gospel, which is literally and actually “good news”. Law shows us our sinfulness. Gospel shows us our salvation. The Gospel shows us our Savior. When we think of God’s Word as a light, we think especially of the Gospel which shines with the light of salvation.

The path God would lead us on each day is not whatever we want it to be, but it is God’s right way. It is his righteous judgments and his precepts. On such a path there is no danger or trap but blessings and joy.

Just as you want a light when you are walking along a difficult or strange path, we need a light to make sure we can avoid a tree root, a rock that sticks up, or a log in our path. As we are going through life, we want light on the path in front of us.

When you are driving your car, you want to have a clear view of the immediate road ahead and at night you are grateful for your headlights. You don’t like dangerous surprises. You want to be able to see where you are going. So it is in life. We need the flashlight, the lamp, the torch, the headlights to illuminate what is in front of us. We want to know if dangers, hazards or problems lie before us.

To walk in God’s path of right living means that we need to “see” and be aware of the hazards of sin. And it is the Word of God’s Law which teaches us about these.

The psalmist says that the word of God casts light on obstacles to wholesome living. Like navigating any highway, road or path, some things you’ve just got to go around and avoid. Other problems are like potholes that need to be filled with solid material and paved over. Some issues, like a tree across a road, need to be sawed up and emphatically removed.

Light is the very nature of the Word of God. God gave his word to be a light for our path throughout our life.

God’s Word shows us what we could not have known. And the word of the Gospel is essential for our eternal salvation. The word of the Gospel tells us about Jesus Christ and all that God has done for mankind – and especially for you this morning.

The Gospel tells us of the love of God in sending his Son to rescue sinful mankind from an eternity in hell.

The path God wants all men to see clearly and to follow is the path of eternal life.

And that path leads you to faith that Jesus Christ is your Savior, not just another step in our earthly life. Scripture plainly tells us ***“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*** (Romans 10:17, KJV)

God rescued you from darkness here on earth, but more importantly he rescued you from the eternal darkness of hell and its unending suffering.

The Word of God is not just for our eyes, to see, but for our hearts and for our feet, to guide us. The Word of God creates faith, and faith leads the Christian to eternal life. God’s word helps me find my way in the dark and not get lost.

Sometimes we want to know what God has in store next week, next month, next year, and for the rest of my life. But God doesn’t reveal the whole blueprint right now.

God gives us a light for our path. You see well enough to take the next step, and then the next step. The end of the road appears to be all darkness. But it will be lit when you get near enough.

The Word of God is an inextinguishable lamp to guide us along the right path, and it is a radiant light that banishes the shadows of uncertainty, by illuminating the next step in this sin-soaked world.

Opening up of the pages of Scripture will brighten the path we take, re-energize our hope in Christ, and provide understanding to the one who walks humbly before the Lord.

God's Word is the light of truth that is written for our learning to lead us away from each shadowy danger that crosses our path and to strengthen our faith in our Savior as He gently leads us. It lifts the darkness before us and straightens every crooked path.

His Word not only brightens our pathway, guards us on our journey through life, and warns us of each lurking danger, but it is a treasure-trove of precious gemstones to be hidden deep within our heart - for it contains words of wisdom to guide our thinking, precious promises to encourage our hearts, godly instruction on how to live as the Lord desires us to live, and it is the perfect pattern for Christian living and our daily conduct.

The Bible is the sure Word of the living God, who has promised us eternal life through faith in him. This has been God's message from the time of the first sin, and all God's children do well to take heed to its precious pages as a light that shines in a dark place.

We do well to read, mark, learn, and ponder the Word of God, and to guard it within our hearts, for it is a lamp to our feet, a light to our path, and it brightens up every corner of our lives - for it is God's instrument to lead us unto eternal life and to guide our feet into His way of truth.

Wherever God leads, that is where we will go. We know whom we are following, and we want to be near him, and that is enough, for he is the fullness of life; he is the way, the truth, and the life.

We go back to verse 89 of this psalm and find hope and comfort:

***89 "Your word, O LORD, is eternal;
it stands firm in the heavens.***

***90 Your faithfulness continues through all generations;
you established the earth, and it endures.***

***91 Your laws endure to this day,
for all things serve you.***

***92 If your law had not been my delight,
I would have perished in my affliction.***

***93 I will never forget your precepts,
for by them you have preserved my life."***

May these words following our text be our hope as we close this sermon:

***111 "Your statutes, your testimonies, are my heritage forever;
they are the joy of my heart.***

***112 My heart is set on keeping your decrees
to the very end."*** Amen.