

**Preacher:** Pastor Twyla

**Scripture:** Ephesians 5:8-14

*You groped your way through that murk once, but no longer. You're out in the open now. The bright light of Christ makes your way plain. So, no more stumbling around. Get on with it! The good, the right, the true—these are the actions appropriate for daylight hours. Figure out what will please Christ, and then do it.*

*Don't waste your time on useless work, mere busywork, the barren pursuits of darkness. Expose these things for the sham they are. It's a scandal when people waste their lives on things they must do in the darkness where no one will see. Rip the cover off those frauds and see how attractive they look in the light of Christ.*

*Wake up from your sleep,*

*Climb out of your coffins;*

*Christ will show you the light!*

*So, watch your step. Use your head. Make the most of every chance you get. These are desperate times!*

I read a story, the writer says, "One of my least favorite creatures in God's creation is a cockroach. I don't like to look at them, step on them, or hear them scurrying across the floor. We seldom see cockroaches during the day because they don't like the light. They live and do most of the things cockroaches like to do at night. On occasion, I have walked into a room, turned on a light, and seen a cockroach scurrying for a dark crevice to hide.

In today's passage from Ephesians, Paul encourages his friends in Ephesus to expose the deeds of the disobedient. What does Paul mean by this? How should we expose those who are walking in darkness? Should we turn a light on them just like a cockroach in a dark room? Or is there a better way?" These are questions to consider as we ponder Paul's message in today's text.

Paul wrote this letter—likely while he was in prison—and sent it with Tychicus, a messenger from the church in Ephesus, to the church in Ephesus. He did not write the letter to address any heresy or problems. It was written to encourage the church. Paul served at the church for three years. As a result, he was very close to the congregation. It was a sad day for both when Paul felt led to move on to the next place where God needed him to serve. Because the letter does not contain any specific references to any people or any problems in the Ephesian church, it is thought that it might be a letter Paul wrote to be circulated among other churches, too.

A common theme we find in several of Paul's letters, as well as this one, is unity among the body and commitment to the use of individual gifts through the work of the church. He encourages everyone in the church to live by the highest moral standards, as defined by God's law and further defined through Christ's teachings.

Paul reminded them that they, too, once lived in darkness. They were Gentiles with little or no knowledge of Christ, but had been saved and now walk with Christ. He goes on to say to them in verse ten that they should always resist all fruitless work which leads to sin. Sin survives and creates havoc in one who is trapped in the state of ignorance and rejection of Christ. Sin tries to hide itself, like a cockroach, under the cover of darkness.

Paul acknowledges, what was probably obvious and trying to the church, that they were living in dark times. He encourages them, therefore, to be instruments of light amidst the darkness, and in doing so, the light would expose the sin of darkness. As we all know, when one wants to enter a dark room, we usually reach for a light so we can see where we are going and

not trip over things that are in the room. Likewise, a Christian, filled with the light of Christ shines into the darkness of sin and exposes the bad or evil deeds one might participate in and hopefully then bringing about change. I think most of us understand this concept.

But there's more to what Paul shared. He shares a quote from the prophet Isaiah, found in Isaiah 60:1. The prophet was speaking to the people in Jerusalem. He said to them, "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead." The prophet Isaiah urges the people to wake up from the night to let its light shine before the nations because God's glory was with them. They had been asleep by not wholeheartedly honoring God with their lives. Paul now was urging those in Ephesus to be aware of the sleepy and dark condition into which they were slipping.

The text invites us to think about our walk with Jesus, and he asks us to exam our lives to see whether we have slipped into living our lives like sleepwalkers—half asleep and half awake. We have our daily routines. We get up, eat breakfast; some go to work while others complete household chores, volunteer work, or keep \ appointments. We watch television, maybe read the paper, or check Facebook or surf the internet. We have all these things that we do, day-in and day-out. During the everyday monotonous routines of life, we may not be living in darkness, but then, we may not be living in the light either. We may be half asleep and missing out on the joy of letting our light shine for others to see.

I look back on occasions over my lifetime when I wondered if the church has fallen asleep when darkness seems to be covering the earth and evil has free movement to create havoc all over the world, creating fear and hatred and leading to sin. I feel as though those days don't come up very often, but that we are living through them again now. I fear for the future of the church; but then I remember that God will win in the end.

When darkness feels overwhelming and powerful in our personal lives and in the world, our desire is for it to go away, we look for meaning in our lives and something to make our lives better. Sometimes our impatience gets the best of us, and we turn our focus to the wrong things. We focus on the darkness, our worries, and our fears instead of on God's light.

Recently, I have been trying to get things in order for my retirement. The most challenging efforts have been applying for social security and retirement benefits. I get overwhelmed by the feelings that I might make a mistake on the forms, slowing down the process of getting things rolling. Too many nights I got to bed and all I can think about is wanting to get this done. A cloud of darkness falls over me and I can't fall asleep. Quite honestly, it affects my daytime hours as I try to focus on what I need to accomplish, and this week there was a lot to accomplish. One night this week as I was struggling to fall asleep, I heard a voice telling me, something I have said many times to others: think about things from today that I am thankful for. It was tough to not allow my thoughts to wonder back to my worry, but I did think about those things, and I gave thanks for them, and soon I fell asleep.

I know I'm not alone with losing focus. People turn to many things that just reinforce the darkness. Some people turn to various addictions for a temporary escape from our troubles and worries; some turn to social media to find comrades who stand with them to support them in their evil ventures or to find acceptance for their misguided beliefs, or to find attention from others that fills a void within themselves. People are being misled and used as a result in some instances. Some are finding meaningless moments of satisfaction that fade and make them feel emptier than before. And we know a lot about a whole host of other avenues where darkness makes its mark and scars people.

As I reflected on these things, I agonized over Paul's message to wake up and let our light shine. What would the world look like if more Christians stopped sleepwalking through

life? What would the world look like if all of our lights were turned on and if we were all on fire for Jesus? What would it take to get the church, and the world excited about Jesus and his teachings, about their faith, about obedience and service to God's Word? What would it take to light a spark under the church for God's light to reach the world. How can the church shift gears from moaning and groaning and worrying about the darkness in our world? Would it help if we focused on the promises of God and living in the promises of God, looking for beauty and joy in the world and spreading joy and beauty in the world, and then living like people who have a reason to shine a light in the world.

Yes, this helps to get us focused in the right direction. Paul defines living in the light as walking in goodness, righteousness, and truth and finding out what pleases God. Living in the light calls Christians to imitate Jesus and love others as he first loved us. When we are moved by our spiritual excitement and passion for Jesus, we exude his presence, so much so, that people notice that there's something different about us, and they are drawn to want to know what it is that we possess to make us this way.

Paul tells us that it's critically important that we walk awake in the light during those hum-drum times of our lives, not just when there is a crisis occurring and advancing darkness around us. The light of Christ that shines through us every day exposes the darkness that will do anything to get our attention and the to get the attention of those around us. Paul tells us it's important that we expose the darkness, not separate ourselves from those who are stuck in it. If we are going to expose the darkness for the evil it is, we need to break out of our safe sanctuaries to share the light of Christ.

Having said that, Paul does not direct us to expose the disobedient by calling them out and telling them they are evil. Paul says that our conversation should be gracious, effective, and pleasant without accusation. (Colossians 4:6). Who would want to listen to and believe a person's message of God's love if they are spoken to in a judgmental and demeaning manner?

Churches have empty pews. Some are even closing. Is this because we haven't invited people to join us? Or could it be something more? Something missing in the lives of Christians? A light, a spark, energy that relays our joy in knowing Jesus as Savior of our lives. Do we talk about him? Do we communicate how he has made a difference in our lives?

Have we invited someone to church, to meet Jesus, just as you do through your time with your church family? Have you spoken to a youth or a young person, loving on them to make them feel a part of God's family, not just on Sunday morning if you bump into them, but going out of your way to do something as simple as sending them a note of encouragement? Are we being personal in sharing our light so that others might see and desire this special something—this Jesus that we know? My friends, let's walk in the light, and let's be a light for God!!! Amen.