



Poland Presbyterian Church

At the Green since 1802

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A Sermon by Brent J. Eelman

Children of Light in an Oft' Dark World

Note: I originally planned to preach a sermon with a thanksgiving theme, but on Saturday, Nov. 14th, following the Paris terrorist attacks, I wrote this sermon in response. I apologize if the syntax/punctuation etc. is not quite polished. Also, this manuscript does not reflect some of the extemporaneous anecdotes that I shared from the pulpit.

I Thessalonians 5: 1-11

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers,* you do not need to have anything written to you. ²For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³When they say, 'There is peace and security', then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! ⁴But you, beloved,* are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; ⁵for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. ⁶So then, let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; ⁷for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

The basic ethical dilemma of being a Christian in the modern world is how we live out our lives as witnesses to the Jesus Christ who we know as the light of the world? In the words of Paul: how do we live as "children of light" in a world that is often a dark place?

This weekend we have been reminded of the reality of darkness in our world. The coordinated attacks upon the city of Paris was evil. It was an assault upon human dignity and innocent lives. I need not comment further on the sickening nature of the events that have come to light, nor will I add my two cents to all the commentary that has filled the airwaves. Suffice it to say, the reality of darkness and the reach power of evil should not be questioned or doubted by any of us.

The bible is realistic about the omnipresence of evil in our lives. It does not sugar coat the pain and suffering we human beings often visit upon others. The significance of the cross is that darkness is real, but is overcome by the light of Jesus Christ. The bible does, however, address the context in which we live, and calls us to be "children of light" in a world that seems to dwell in darkness.

Paul wrote in his letter to the church at Thessalonica, "you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness." Light and Darkness are metaphors for the reality with which we live daily. This morning, 1) I want to speak about the reality of evil in the world. 2)

Second, I will address how we are to live as people of faith in the world. 3) Third, I would like to address the importance of a community of faith to our life in the world.

I

Evil is real. There is a part of each of us that would rather not acknowledge some of the realities of life. For a host of reasons, we do not like to be confronted with some of the events that are part of life on this earth. I am no different. I often find myself turning off the radio or the TV if the news or the topic is particularly unpleasant. When I was parent with a child at home, I wanted to desperately shield her from the dark realities of this world. That is part of being a parent. Often this is rooted in our own pain and the psychological and spiritual wounds that we carry through life.

The truth is that often our world is characterized by darkness and the power evil, and we go to great lengths to shield ourselves from this reality. We build fences and walls, some psychological, some made out of wood and stone, so that we are isolated and feel safe. But evil and the powers of darkness still touch all aspects of our lives, and every now and then we are dramatically reminded of this. Evil is insidious and it taints the best of us. Evil is even present in our most magnanimous and selfless actions. (This is what the reformers meant by *total depravity*).

Many of us were absolutely horrified at the video and descriptions of events that came from Paris this weekend. It is not supposed to happen there. It is too close. The violence and murder in God's world serves as a reminder of the reality of the darkness that is so much a part of life. We ignore this reality in the world at our own peril. We also ignore this reality in ourselves at our own peril.

II

Living as people of faith: Paul wrote the Thessalonians and stated, "You are all children of light, not of the darkness." What does that mean for our lives? How do we function as children of light in the darkness that seems to be so much a part of life on this planet?

The Gospel of John begins with these words about Jesus: *in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.* Living as children of light is a call to:

- a. Affirm that the true light and hope of the world was embodied by Christ. More often than not we favor the lesser lights of life: people we admire (particularly celebrities and athletes), people who are in positions of power and authority. Our admiration (and even worship) of these lesser lights keeps us from witnessing and Pointing to the true light of the world.
- b. Living as children of light is a call to shine the light of truth in the darkest places of life's existence. Evil has a way of preferring the shadows and the dark corners of existence.

Children of light are called:

- to illumine the dark places;
- to speak the truth in love to the world;
- to acknowledge the darkness is that is often in our lives and our hearts.

I am intrigued by mystery stories and the role of the detective in those stories. Those who study literature have suggested that the mystery story is the last Christian archetype in fiction. The mystery begins with an evil act. The characters are surrounded by darkness.

The detective solves the mystery by shining the light of truth upon the events, and illuminating those events that occurred, hidden in the shadows. In the end, the truth prevails and goodness triumphs over evil.

Living as children of light is a call: to illumine the dark places of human life with the brightness of truth. It also means bringing:

- the light of hope to the hopeless;
- the light of love to the unloved; the light of shelter to the homeless;
- the light of healing to ill;
- the light of peace to those who victimized by violence.
- the light of indictment to those who foment violence and to the merchants of death.

- c. Living as children of light is a call to confession of our own sinfulness and the presence of darkness in our own lives. Darkness dwells in each of us. Allow me continue with the metaphor of the detective. In order for a detective to solve the mystery, she or he must be able to think like the perpetrator of the crime. In other words, a detective cannot be naïve about her own capacity for evil. She often depends upon her own intimacy with the powers of darkness and evil in order to bring the truth into the light. Self-knowledge of our own shortcomings and our own propensity for sinful behavior is also integral to being children of light.

III

This is not something that we can do on our own. It takes tremendous moral courage to live as a child of light in this world. It takes the support and the love of others in order to shine the light of truth and the hope of the gospel in the darker places of human existence. It requires a community of faith and support.

There is a price that is often paid by those who tell the truth in a culture where darkness and secrecy abide. All of us need a safe place, a safe community, a collection of people who will love and support us as we rise to Paul's challenge to be the children of light.

Finally, as a community of faith we need to educate our children about the reality of evil in the world. We cannot shield them from this reality and they need to know and understand it. Our youth need to also recognize this inclination within their own behavior.

For you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then, let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. This is a call to let the light of Christ shine within us and illumine this world. Amen.