

“Live as Children of Light”

A man named Lester Dotts was the father of one of my Elders of the church I served in Iowa. He was in a nursing home located about a half hour away from where we lived. He had farmed most of his life, and his wife had died about ten years before I met him. Each month I would go and visit Lester, having devotions and prayer. He would also like to sing one song, “In the Garden”. Even though he couldn’t carry a tune as we sang together, he loved to sing that song from memory.

Lester was also a huge Chicago Cubs fan, and when I would prepare my visits, I would have to check the standings to see where the Cubs stood and who was contending for the division. He always appreciated the update. Now you would think that Lester could have checked the newspaper and found out for himself. Lester’s problem was that he couldn’t. Lester’s problem was that he was blind. He had become blind eight years before I met him. It frustrated him in that he who used to see fields and cattle and home and family could no longer see. He was in a dark prison with no door to escape.

But Lester did something that enabled him to have vision. No, it wasn’t an operation to regain his sight. At his age of 80+ years, there wasn’t any promising operation that would return his sight. He had vision in a different way. When I met him, he was not a member of the church. But after reading the catechism to him and explaining the questions and answers, he would learn the Six Chief Parts as we learned Luther’s *Small Catechism*. He confessed his faith in Jesus, renounced the devil and all his works and all his ways, and would become a confirmed member of the Church. I would give him communion to affirm his faith and the forgiveness of his sins.

A couple years after coming to La Porte, I learned that Lester passed away. Secure now in the arms of our Savior, Lester looks forward to the day of the resurrection, when his sight and whole being would be restored and he would gaze upon the beauty of the Lord. Yet even though he was blind, he could see by faith and believe in Jesus, his Lord and Savior. Lester knew how important light was in his life while being

able to see. Once plunged into the darkness of blindness, his everyday life would become difficult. He needed light, but his blindness prevented him from doing the usual things.

God knows that we need light. That is why the first thing He did at creation was to say, **“Let there be light.”** And there was light. The theme of blindness and sight—darkness and light—comes at the midpoint of this Lenten season, where we are warned of the danger of turning back to the world and the use of human reason to understand spiritual matters, as well as being called to walk in righteousness and not in the ways of sin.

Our readings today talk about having our eyes opened and to see. Jesus opens the eyes of the blind. The Apostle Paul tells sleepers to wake up and see the light of Christ shine on them. The prophet foretells what God would do in order to turn darkness into light. We examine these readings to prepare us to live as children of light.

The restoring of sight was unheard of in the Old Testament. It isn't until Jesus comes that those who were blind could now see. Jesus' disciples had thought that his blindness was the result of someone's sin, either his parents or his own. But Jesus says it was neither, but that the work of God would be made known in him. After his sight is given him, the blind man has a lot of explaining to do.

The Pharisees were unwilling to acknowledge Jesus as the prophet sent from God. Because of his testimony the Pharisees excluded him from the synagogue. Jesus wanted to affirm this man's faith, so He asked him, **“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”** Up to this point, the blind man, now with sight, had only heard Jesus' voice. He recognized the voice as the one who told him to wash the mud placed in his eyes. He asked, **“Who is he, sir? Tell me so that I may believe in him.”**

Similar in response to last Sunday's Gospel with the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, an outcast of their society, Jesus responds to this man, another outcast because of his physical handicap, **“You have now seen Him; in fact, He is the one speaking with you.”**

He replied, **“Lord, I believe,”** and he worshiped Jesus. Instead of simple and polite, 'sir,' this man now acknowledges Jesus as 'Lord'.

Faith has been created in this man who sees Jesus, where the Pharisees were now blind.

Whether we are like Lester and lose our sight later in life, or whether we are like the man born blind, either way we would be in darkness. There's a difference in saying we were *in* darkness compared to we *were* darkness. While vacationing in Missouri one summer, we went to the Merimac Caverns. After walking the path down into the cavern, the tour guide had us stand in one place and then turned off the lights. We were plunged into utter darkness. No sunlight penetrated or filtered into the deep hole we were in. After about one minute, the lights were turned on, and we could then see. We were *in* darkness.

But the Apostle Paul tells us that we *were* darkness. There was no light in us at all. We were darkness with original sin, the sin inherited from our first parents, Adam and Eve. The Psalmist David explains, **“In sin did my mother conceive me.”**

Also, we were darkness with actual sins, those sins of what we do and what we fail to do. In the section before our reading today, Paul identifies some of those sins, both open and secret, that plagues the Christian. Not only are we affected in our walking and working amidst the thorns and thistles of this world, we also are plunged into the idolatry and sin of this evil age. We became partners with the sin of this world as we have sinned and continue to participate in it. We are made blind. But there is hope.

Just as the man born blind was cured of his blindness, so we have been called out of darkness into God's marvelous light. God sees and knows we are in this darkness and that we do not belong here. Jesus was sent to seek and to save those who are lost, those who are in the darkness of unbelief, those in the deepest depths of their sin. Jesus enters our world and we behold what He has done, 100%. He gave us sight through the waters of Baptism, just as He put mud into the eyes of the blind man and sent him to the Pool of Siloam to wash. This blind man, now cured, could see. His cure came entirely from outside himself. His conversion from blindness to sight is like our conversion from death to life.

This is what happens in our baptism in Christ. We take on His death and

are given His life, as St. Paul writes, Romans, chapter 6, **“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?” We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.** Through baptism and the saving Word, we are made light in Christ.

Baptism saves you. This gracious washing is action done to you. Just as God created light in the darkness at creation, so He creates new life in you. You were dead in trespasses and sins; but now you are saved by grace. The blind man could not cure himself of his blindness. Lester could not perform surgery on his own eyes and have his sight restored. Neither can we save ourselves from the darkness of sin. Jesus Christ came to do both, cure this man and save us, to the glory of God the Father.

The disciples’ original question of who sinned was set aside to give glory to God. Like the Pharisees, man is concerned with laying the blame on someone or something for the causes of his discomfort and plight. God does not punish us as we deserve, but gives grace to sustain us in our sufferings and patience and time to search God’s wisdom rather than the counsels of man. God’s grace calls us to repentance and faith. God’s grace calls us to walk as children of light.

Herein we see the work of the Holy Spirit: Our sanctification. Here we live as children of light. In John’s Gospel, we hear Jesus tell us, **“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall certainly not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”**

These are opposed by the *fruitless* deeds of darkness. We are commanded not to have anything to do with these, but rather expose them. God’s Law is like a piercing searchlight, and it catches the shameful deeds of people in sin. Throughout the letter to the Ephesians, Paul makes mention of several sins that were prevalent in Ephesus. These deeds are to be put away. Unholy living, including all works of uncleanness, greediness, lying, bitterness, wrath, anger, evil speaking, sexual sins—this list could go on. These are not what we have learned about Jesus Christ.

The Psalmist gives us these words: **“One thing I have asked of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in His temple”** (Psalm 27:4). Just like the blind man, you will be led to say, **“Lord, I believe.”** This is walking as children of light.

That walking begins with Jesus. Jesus takes our blindness on His cross. He takes the utter darkness of separation from God, that separation we deserved because of our sins, and endured the punishment we should have received. He takes on our sin and sheds His blood to redeem us. Jesus becomes for us that blind servant.

This Lenten season calls us to repentance and faith as we look to Jesus, the one who endured the cross, despising its shame, and is now seated at the right hand of God the Father. He takes us and leads us on paths that lead to His righteousness through Word and Sacrament. We are renewed by God’s Spirit who enables us to walk as children of light, meditating on the Word of God, inquiring in His temple, and serving Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

We know of many church members who have not attended faithfully to hear the saving news of Christ. They have not seen His glory given in the forms of bread and wine in Holy Communion. We can only pray that the Lord of the Church would seek these people and place His hand of grace on their spiritual eyes and renew their sight and keep them in the faith. Perhaps you know these people from this congregation. As you walk as a child of the light, you can invite them back to know of Christ’s forgiveness and love.

It is also necessary that those who are learning to become members of the church are encouraged so they do not wander away from Christ and walk in the darkness of sin, evil, and idolatry. We walk with them and encourage them to remain faithful as children of light and walk on the path of righteousness.

Paul encourages us, **“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”** The Holy Spirit has called us by the Gospel and enlightened us with His saving gifts. He guards and defends us from those things that would make us blind, especially from the devil,

the world, and our own sinful short-sightedness. The one sleeping is the Christian who has grown weary of doing good works. This call to awake and rise is also directed to the believers.

Christ's light will shine on those hearts darkened by sin, idolatry, and all the other unfruitful works of darkness, expose them, and with His blood forgive and grant faith. Remember that idleness is one of those deeds of darkness. Just as a plant will produce fruit only when placed in sunlight, so you, as His dearly beloved children, will produce fruit when the light of Christ shines on you.

Today the mud of repentance is being applied to your spiritual eyes, and you are sent to this Pool of Siloam, this sanctuary, to wash in the forgiveness of Christ and receive sight to see and know and confess Jesus as your Lord. By His spoken word, by the remembrance of your baptism, by your faithful eating and drinking of Christ's holy Body and Blood, you are granted forgiveness. Your faith is strengthened to walk as children of light on the path of righteousness.

O come, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Amen.