

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church  
Shobonier, Illinois  
Epiphany 3A  
January 22, 2023  
Matthew 4:12-25

Called Out of Darkness into the Light

“. . . the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned." 17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:16-17 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

Isaiah writes 700 years before Christ, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone." (Is. 9:2). This was fulfilled when Jesus came on the scene and began His ministry, as Matthew records: "The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned."

Yes, on those who saw and heard Jesus in person, many of whom were healed of their afflictions, the light had dawned. Yet, it most certainly dawns on us as well. After all, we dwell in the shadow of death. Illness, disease, and afflictions are but signs of the death that lives in each of us. Death is all around us and it comes calling for all of us.

But, not only death. It's the darkness too. We live in a land of darkness. Sin, defiance of God's commands, people doing what God says not to do. On this 50th anniversary of the Supreme Court's Roe vs. Wade decision establishing abortion as legal, which decision has now, God be praised, been struck down and reversed, abortions continue to happen. People ramp up their efforts to destroy innocent human life, life given by God. Likewise, we are surrounded by sexual perversions and depravity beyond number. What was once only done in darkness is now brought into the light and paraded around in pride. Our children are under assault in so many ways and are often used as tools and weapons against God and family. There are many who create and foster division based only on the color of one's skin. In short, there are some who want to destroy our way of life and our freedoms.

And as bad as that darkness is, there's an even greater darkness. It's the darkness of sin and rebellion against God within each of us. The old Adam in us was drowned in baptism, but he has a habit of coming up for air and tuning out God and doing whatever he feels like. We think, "I want what feels good for me. I don't care what God says. I want what I want." That, my friends, is sin. And it's the darkness inside every one of us.

And this is why we die. We've all got the sin disease. But here's the good news. Without our doing anything to deserve it, without any good in us, the light invaded our darkness. Life has dawned in the shadowlands of death. It came in the coming of the Christ. "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1:4-5).

Jesus, our brother, came into our hall of gray and gloomy sadness, and He lights up the room! When we get to know Jesus, we discover what life really is! It finally dawns on us, something we hadn't known, that we can know God, in Christ. Jesus comes, full of grace and truth. He comes, with healing in His wings. He comes, dispersing the darkness and enlightening our minds. We have peace in the present and hope for the future, in Him.

What Jesus, the very Son of God, has done is to overcome the darkness and death with His light and His life. Jesus lights the way. He is the way. Jesus himself walked in the way of God's commandments, which we have not. He did the righteous thing, every time. Jesus fulfilled the way humans should live, walking in the light. But then the darkness tried to overcome His light. Herod tried to kill Him. The devil tried to kill Him. Jesus was betrayed, arrested, and tried in the darkness of night. He was handed over to be crucified, and darkness literally fell over the land. But the darkness, even death, could not overcome Him. Jesus conquered precisely by His death. This was how He stomped on the devil's head and destroyed death. Jesus delivered us from the power of death by taking our sins upon Himself and letting the judgment fall on Him instead of on us. Death's stranglehold on us is broken. The victory remains with life. Jesus is risen, and trusting in Him, we too will rise. For those dwelling in the shadow of death, on us the light has dawned.

That's why Peter writes, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." (1 Peter 2:9-10).

So, how do we live and walk in the light of Christ? First, and always, listen to Jesus, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Where Jesus is, there is the kingdom of heaven. And Jesus is here, dwelling in our midst. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matt. 18:20). Jesus is here. The kingdom is near. We've been called out of darkness. We've been brought into the light. Give up the ways of darkness. Quit tuning out God. Stop living for self, setting yourself up over others. Repent. Turn from those old, selfish, sinful ways.

For example, how have I been using my tongue to speak of my brothers and sisters in Christ? Do I tear down my church, speaking ill of my fellow church members behind their backs? That was the sin that St. Paul rebuked the Corinthians for, divisions within the congregation. Paul writes: "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same

mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers." (1 Cor. 1:10-11).

That's just one example. Beloved, we need to be walking in the light, and walking that way together. If you or I have been doing otherwise, we need to repent. When you see those things in yourself, repent. Ask God to forgive you for Christ's sake, and to pick you up and help you to do better.

Likewise, walking in the light is following Jesus. That's what Jesus told the fishermen. "Follow me," He said. "Be my disciples. Learn from me. Follow me in faith. Follow me into life." This is the life of discipleship. This is what it means to be walking in the light. To be following and learning from Jesus.

And this didn't stop when you were confirmed. Jesus is about making disciples for life. We are lifelong learners. How do we do that? Certainly, by coming to church every Sunday, every chance we get. This is where Jesus speaks to us through His Word. To follow Jesus means to listen to His voice, to hear what He has to say. And to go even deeper, I encourage you all to come to Bible class too. As we study the Word together, your faith will be deepened, and you will be better equipped to live as Christ's disciple. Discipleship is knowing Christ. It's growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. And then applying it to your life, putting your faith into practice, putting love into action.

"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men," Jesus told the fishermen. Now, of course, this applies in the first place to the apostles, and from there to pastors, as preachers of the gospel. But in a broader sense, this call to be fishers of men applies to the church as a whole. How will more people come into the net of the church and find life? Through the witness of Christ's people. How you live and how you talk will have an effect and an influence on others. How you speak of Jesus to your friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors—the people you know, the people you have a relationship with, the people you encounter and get to know—you are Christ's witness wherever you go. How you speak of your church, Immanuel (or Augsburg), and of the joys of Christ you experience here, the hope you find, even amid the struggles of life—this is part of your witness. You're a fisher of men when you are attracting and inviting others to join you here where Jesus is.

Friends, this is where the light of life is shining. The kingdom of heaven is here, at hand. So, repent of the ways of darkness. Jesus is calling you to follow Him, to grow in your life of discipleship. And as you do, you will naturally be a fisher of men, bearing witness to the Savior. God grant that you walk always in the light of Christ. To whom be the glory now and forever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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