

SERMON BY LCAVIC/TAS BISHOP GREG PIETSCH

Worship Service at General Convention of Synod

Saturday, 3 October 2015

Text: Ephesians 5:6-14

'For you were once darkness but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light...' (Ephesians 5:8)

1. Vision – Living in the light

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Well dear brothers and sisters, the day has come – the day we've been anticipating and working towards for a long time [the day we consider proposals on the ordination question].

We've read the papers, we've met in groups, we've listened and we've contributed – told how we see the question and what we believe God says about it.

We're a 'confessional church' – one that believes, teaches and confesses that 'the holy scriptures are... the divinely inspired, written and inerrant Word of God, and the only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine and life', and that the Lutheran Confessions are 'true expositions of the Word of God.'

This is the unalterable article of our church's constitution. More than anything else it defines who we are.

And that's as it should be. After all Jesus prays to his Father, 'Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth' (John 17:17) – and then himself says to us, 'If you love me you will keep what I command' (John 14:15).

This of course is our struggle – to agree on what it is that our Lord commands; what truth his word is saying.

The reading this morning even begins, 'Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient'. Maybe some of you are applying these words to some of the arguments we heard yesterday and maybe to some of the people making them, too.

But let's remember that when St Paul talks to churches where there's disagreement and even hostile division, he still addresses them – he still addresses us all – as *saints*, and reminds us over and over again about 'our new life in Christ' – as also in this morning's reading: 'For you were once darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Paul then calls us to actively live this out – to draw on our new identity in Christ and let it make a real difference to our life together, including when we are in dispute: Live as children of light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true'.

Light is a wonderful, wonderful part of creation – the very *first part* God put in place when he said, 'Let there be light'.

Light is needed by all living things to grow and thrive.

Even things that live in the dark like mushrooms need light because they feed off plants that live by the sun.

Life on earth – and our life too – depends on the sun.

The sun is the *source* of light for the earth – it's not part of the earth, but is a star eight light-minutes away which *shines on* our planet-home so we can live and be blessed by it.

It's in the light of the sun that we wake; it's in the light of the sun that we see clearly; it's in the light of the sun that we engage in life.

By it living things are energised and fed and propagated – growing and bearing fruit which fuels the food chain on which we all rely – fruit which *bears seed* so that life continues in the next generation.

Now this central place of light isn't just true for physical things but also for the core of our life with God our Creator and Redeemer.

Light and life go together with God – which is why they go together with us, and why St Paul uses light and darkness, fruitfulness and fruitlessness in the text: 'Once you were darkness but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light – for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible.'

God made us to enjoy the light of his company and gifts, the richness of life from him.

Just as the God-provided sun is the source of physical light on earth, so God himself is the source of knowledge and life in its deepest dimensions, and our fruitfulness depends on receiving light from him.

And this light comes by his word – 'Lord, your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path'.

That's why we pay so much attention to God's word.

By it we know the world and our part in it as they really are.

By it we know our sin and its consequences, and by it we know our Saviour and the salvation he has won for us.

By it we flourish and produce good and beautiful fruit for God's glory and the benefit of others.

2. Malady – Sin and darkness instead

But sadly too often we *hide away* from the light – neglect, misuse or simply don't trust his word.

Too often we get caught in dark deeds and ideas.

Years ago my wife and I visited Cappadocia in central Turkey where there are ancient villages built underground – a bit like Coober Pedy but far deeper and more extensive – refuges from marauders and eventually as permanent settlements.

We visited one at Kaymakli, arriving mid-afternoon on a quiet day.

We were fascinated as we worked our way down the stairways and passages lit by electric light.

But when we were at the bottom – four or so storeys down – all of a sudden the lights went out!

I've never experienced darkness like it – complete and utter blackness! I couldn't even perceive any depth of vision in front of my eyes whatsoever.

Well, we waited for a bit, frozen to our spots, expecting someone to fix the problem, replace the fuse or whatever.

But nothing happened – and nothing continued to happen!

Now this was before mobile phones which you can pull out of your pocket and use like a torch – so with our hands outstretched we edged our way toward where we thought the stairs were – and by God's mercy actually found them, by touch, and inched our way up them.

Well when we got near the top, light began to appear as we got close to the entrance – just in time to find the operators padlocking the wire mesh gate from the outside!

They thought all the tourists had left and they were shutting up for the day!
It's times like that you really say, 'Thank you Lord'.

So yes, we experience times of darkness in relation to God as well – as some may be feeling right now.

It's not that God's gone away or stopped shining for us – it was bright and sunny that day in Turkey – but that we're not in the right place to receive his light in regard to this particular matter right now.

At such a time especially it's important not to walk further into darkness, but to search out and head for the light, stepping out of the shadows of misplaced fear which fuels unfruitful and damaging behaviour like the fight or flight responses when in conflict with others;

opening the curtains on wants turned into cravings turned into demands requiring murderous sacrifices, often of relationships and the good name of others as we speak unwell of them behind their backs – deeds done in secret; sunbaking in faith only in God and his word instead of our own dark schemes or some other power – even the imagined power of bishops!

3. Means – Jesus is the Light, has defeated darkness, and shines on us

That's why on this new day, dear brothers and sisters, we turn again to Jesus, and rejoice so much in the daylight of God's saving work in Christ – gathering us, forgiving us, speaking to us, feeding us, and giving us life afresh, even though as Luther puts it, 'we daily sin much and indeed deserve nothing but punishment'. Praise God for our Lord who alone among all humanity, has uncreated light within himself – holy light, visibly seen at his Transfiguration and heard in his most amazing word.

Praise God for our Lord who alone among all humanity has infinite life within himself, powerfully triumphing at his resurrection and conferred to us in our baptism.

Praise God for Jesus who is 'the Light of the World', as we've been reminded by this Christ candle throughout Convention, shining with such truth and purity that things are ultimately revealed for what they truly are.

Praise God for Jesus who took ultimate darkness and death into himself so thoroughly, so completely that we are saved from them forever – such an incongruence and such a sacrifice that the physical sun itself stopped shining for three hours when his light went out.

Praise God that Jesus opens blind eyes over and over again as his Spirit probes our dark and hidden corners with the light of his word – both law and gospel, his truth and grace.

Praise God that by pure grace he has not turned his face away from us but continues to shine his life-giving S-O-N Son on us, bringing light and life again.

By his mercy this day is no exception.

By his mercy today again, with all that's ahead, he keeps saying to us, 'Sleeper awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you'. (Ephesians 5:14)

In his holy name – Amen.