

## "In Living Color"

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Georgetown Presbyterian Church  
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4<sup>th</sup> Second Sunday in Lent  
Matthew 5: 13-16 and Ephesians 5: 8-14

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Matthew writes in his Gospel that Jesus told those who gathered to hear him, "You are the light of the world...let your light shine before others..."

In our second lesson for this morning, the Apostle Paul writes to the church at Ephesus using that same metaphor. In Ephesians chapter 5, Paul implores Christ's followers to act in a manner worthy of God's son. Paul does so by using that same metaphor Jesus used – that Christ's followers should come out of darkness and walk in the light. Reading now from the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

I enjoy the names of colors. Sometimes I've been known to flip through catalogues like J.Crew or paint listings at hardware stores to see the names of the colors listed. Often the names of the colors remind me of the descriptions of wines – I don't always understand them. You can paint your basement the color "bisque #3" or "whisky sour." You could decorate your teenager's room the colors "Zeus, Voodoo or Xanadu." One clothing company allows you to order a

shirt in the color, "Two if By Sea." I'm still trying to figure out what that is supposed to look like.

Colors can be creative, vibrant and transformative. Watching the Oscars last Sunday I could see how the introduction of color transformed motion pictures.

Our lives are lived in color. Mostly the colors we see, but even those of us who are color blind or who live without sight participate in a culture that uses colors to describe emotions. We say we are "green" with envy or are feel "blue" when things don't going our way.

The Bible is a colorful book. I find thirteen different colors listed in the Bible. Green, purple, ivory, red. "The Lord makes us lie down in green pastures," for example. I haven't found "two if by sea" yet though.

More often and more prominently, the Bible refers not to specific colors but to a broader dichotomy of darkness and light.

The Bible opens with a discussion of darkness and light. In the first two sentences of Genesis, we read that in God's act of creation darkness covered the face of the deep and so God said, "Let there be light and there was light." And "God saw that the light was good."

The books of Psalms and Isaiah speak of God bringing light from darkness.

And you could understand why this imagery resonated with people in the ancient world, for they understood the importance of light. People then did not have electricity or light bulbs. Their livelihood revolved around the growth of crops fed by sunlight and they told time and measured days by light and darkness. They didn't take light for granted and the presence of light made all the difference for them.

The New Testament continues this theme. When Jesus was transfigured his light shown all around, so his followers understood what he meant by walking in light.

Paul appreciated light; he was blinded by God's light on the road to Damascus. So it's no surprise that Paul would refer to light in our lesson today.

Paul was concerned about the immoral behaviors he had heard about among the Ephesians and was trying to tell them that their past behaviors before they became Christians were no longer acceptable now that they were followers of Christ. If they appreciated what it meant to be saved by God's grace they shouldn't continue to act as though they were in the dark, morally asleep or ethically dead.

Paul was imploring them to another standard. He writes that they should live in the light, "for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true."

Do you wonder whether such discussions of light and dark are too stark for the lives we live? We live life in colors, and life, like colors, is complicated and nuanced.

If you mix light and dark, black and white paint, you get the color grey.

I mentioned those crazy colors I read about in fashion magazines. But for industrial projects the color selections are not as creative. Most of the colors are ones you've actually heard of. The most nuanced color I found by far was the color grey. I found 107 different shades of grey industrial paint. I think that's somewhat appropriate. For we spend much of our lives living in grey areas. Despite society's attempt makes things black and white, right and wrong, our lives are lived in shades of grey.

Moral dilemmas are difficult. We see both sides of an issue, but we cannot always see the consequences of our actions and that complicates our decisions.

So when Paul tells us to take "no part in the works of darkness," we wonder where to look for clarity in a world that is a mixture of light and dark.

Researchers in Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in New York reported last week that they have created a paper thin material that absorbs 99.955% of the light that hits it, making it the darkest substance ever made. 30 times as dark as the government's current standard. To paraphrase from the movie *Spinal Tap*, there is "none more black." It's Harry Potter invisibility-cloak level black. 99.9%.

But even the darkest material on earth, even that is not 100% dark. Light still mixes some with it.

Life as we experience it is shades of the colors between light and dark. It is in the shades where we make difficult choices about relationships that are strained or about the health care of a loved one. Where we recognize our energy and time are limited and we have to say “no” to some opportunities. It is within those shades of colors where we, like the Ephesians, are tempted to go in directions we know aren’t right but aren’t sure how to avoid.

It is in the struggles, in the dimness of our certainty, in the lack of clarity of our choices where we are in great need of a standard, of a model, of a savior.

Someone whose shining light can help guide us.

It is within these difficult choices where we give thanks that Christ’s light can guide and transform us. Being a follower of Jesus Christ means being transformed by the light of Christ.

That is why Paul writes not only that people should live as children of the light, but that we are to become light ourselves. Paul writes, “Once you were darkness but now in the Lord you are light.”

Thinking about colors and light is appropriate for this time of year. As February moves into March, we are aware that there is little color outside. By late winter we are tired of barren trees and dark shades, and that low winter sun that sends bright light into our eyes as we drive. As March arrives, our minds turn to

spring and the explosion of colors to come. Flowers and trees that will transform of our natural surroundings.

Knowing Jesus Christ has a transformative effect of transferring the energy of the “Light of the World” to us, and that is what allows us to walk in the light of Christ.

Last weekend I was warming up some chili in the microwave. Having forgotten what my mother taught me about microwaves when I left for college, I put the chili in a bowl, covered the bowl with aluminum foil, placed it in the microwave and proceeded to turn on the microwave oven. The microwave, with the aluminum foil covered bowl in it, went for several seconds until my significantly better-half quickly turned it off with a few pointed comments about the wisdom of my actions. Well, as I then proceeded to read up on electric energy in hopes of determining whether I had likely broken the microwave, I discovered, thanks to an article by Tom Zepf of Creighton University, that light heats material because the long wavelength, or infrared, portion of the light sets the molecules into motion. So the energy transfer of light takes place not at the electronic level, but the molecular level. The molecules of the object begin to change. Light doesn't just impact the surface of an object; the fibers of the object itself are transformed by the light. Paul was trying to get his audience to understand something similar, that being a Christian is about something deep. The light of Christ doesn't just illuminate our lives, its transforms them.

During Lent we reflect. We reflect on our own mortality and sinfulness. We reflect on what Christ means to us. And we reflect Christ's light to those around us.

Recognizing that we are light, we are called to be a light to others.

Jesus told his followers, "You are the light of the world."

And you are the ones who have energy to help do the work of this church in this time.

You are the ones whose molecules move with the goal of doing what is "good and right and true," as Paul put it to the Ephesians.

You are the ones who can be a light that shines for a friend whose life has more confusion than joy.

You are the ones who can count on God to be there for you in your own days and nights of darkness.

The God who sent a colorful rainbow of light to Noah as a sign that He would be there.

There is a story a World War II veteran shared from his diary about his time at war. While serving in the South Pacific in battle he was frightened and homesick. All that had been familiar to him was gone. He was unsure of his fate as he floated far from home. But then in the sky he spotted the Big and Little

Dippers, Scorpio and Gemini – the same constellations he had studied in the blackened sky many nights back home.

Suddenly he felt at home and at peace, realizing the same lights in the sky that he had always known were above him then – and, as he put it, the same God as always was beside him.

Jesus Christ came to be the light that we could move towards. The beacon that wakes us from our slumbers, transforms our beings and inspires our lives.

What light do you see when you look up?

As you live your life in color, what is your north star that keeps you focused?

Daylight savings begins next weekend. There will be more light for us outside.

Not a bad time to be shining our light from the inside too. Amen.