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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
February 1, 2015  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 51:4-12, 1 John 1:5-10

Hymns: 538; 398; 408; 52

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: John 8:12-16

Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

13 The Pharisees therefore said to Him, "You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true."

14 Jesus answered and said to them, "Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from and where I am going. 15 You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. 16 And yet if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I am with the Father who sent Me. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, who shines light into our hearts, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Knowing Real Darkness --

We think of it being dark at night. When we turn off the lights in our bedroom at night it seems pretty dark, in fact if we aren't

careful we might stub a toe on the end of the bed, but as our eyes adjust we realize it isn't really as dark as we thought. I know when I've been camping in the wilderness it is quite a bit darker at night than when we're at home in the city, but even then there is starlight and moonlight, and the lights of distant cities shining up in the sky on the horizon. Once, while we were touring a cave on a vacation trip, when the tour guide had taken us to a room deep inside the cave he told us he was going to turn off the lights so we could experience total darkness. He severely warned us that we should stand still for that short time when all would be dark because there was a sharp drop-off in that room and if anyone wandered at all they could fall and be severely injured or even killed. And then it was **dark**, and one's eyes couldn't adjust and capture some small light because there was no light. It was eerie, even a little scary, but we knew that the lights were going to be turned back on so no one panicked. What if there was no light in such a dark and dangerous place? What then? Who would succeed in finding their way? Or would we all wait for someone to come with a light to guide us back to safety?

This is the depth of spiritual darkness that is in the world. It is impossible to find one's own spiritual way because the darkness is persistent and complete, and the way is perilous. Many claim to know the way to the light of life, but they also are still wandering in deep darkness. We need someone to come with a light, someone to come to our rescue, someone to lead us, to guide and direct us through the perils of this life to our heavenly home. The simple truth our text declares is that –

**THEME: Jesus is the Light of the World.**

As the true light --

**I. Jesus Dispels the Darkness.**

**John 8:12** Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness."

To appreciate what this means for us we really need to understand the darkness Jesus is talking about, the darkness that all who aren't following Jesus are walking in. Spiritual darkness has so many different qualities about it, but it all comes down to comprehending

righteousness. What makes one unrighteous or guilty before the Lord is sin, but a man who cannot see fails to recognize his own *unrighteousness*. Well, we all have a conscience that troubles us when we do wrong, at least it is supposed to, and for most people it does its job to some extent. But then come these ideas and philosophies of the world that attempt to calm the troubled conscience. Minimizing guilt is common to us all. Our mind tries to rationalize away our guilt, excusing what we have done because of the situation we were in. Others need to understand that in the given circumstance we didn't feel we had any other choice but to sin.

So we get into the area of relative morality and situation ethics. So we conclude some sins are really bad, especially when someone else is doing them, and others aren't so bad, maybe because I don't think I was really hurting anyone, you know like victimless crimes. Of course everyone applies this to a lot of the sexual immorality in our country. In our everyday lives we probably apply this to ignoring speed limits, and rolling through stop signs when we can easily see that no one is coming; why should I stop?

Well, eventually that rationalizing doesn't quiet the conscience, maybe because we said or did something that we can't so easily rationalize away, something that really hurts someone, well someone other than God. You know those other sins that only offended God we found we could forget about them, or at least try to, because what's really important is that we don't hurt another person's feelings; like God will just have to get over it. But then we do really feel guilty, and what answer comes from the darkness of this world? Do more good things. Do something especially nice and generous for others; help someone who is in need or hurting. Aren't we all supposed to do that? Yes of course we are! In fact we are supposed to do that anyway, so how can one make up for failure and sin by trying to do what is right and then doing it only imperfectly? Well that's a problem, but keep trying what the darkness says.

This was the path the Pharisees promoted, indeed the righteousness they claimed to own and perfect was the work righteousness of the law. They knew that Jesus discredited this as a false idea. So they despised Jesus and all He stood for. This remains at the core of the

darkness of this world today. The philosophy that we can attain a righteousness by our own works apart from the merits of Christ is commonly found in **all** of the world's religions that don't look to the cross of Christ for salvation. It is so common because it appeals to our flesh. We want to see some merit, some credit for the good deeds that we do. Indeed, this so appealing to human nature that it makes it's way into many organization that should be only social clubs, but they just can't seem to stop themselves from making their organization more attractive by adding this spiritual dimension of man's own righteousness.

Even then it is recognized that attaining this righteous state may be something a man can't attain in a single lifetime, so the mystics of eastern philosophy have adopted the idea of reincarnation. Then one might strive through repeated lifetimes struggling to attain that which is only the deception of darkness.

**Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."**

Jesus is the One who comes to the rescue. He came into the world to dispel the darkness of sin that confounds us, and He leads us out of the darkness. The Pharisees immediately attempted to discredit Jesus by accusing Him of testifying about Himself, and such testimony is not true. Basically, they were accusing Jesus of making it all up and lying about who He was and why He was in the world. Many today, even in what are supposed to be Christian churches "suggest" that perhaps what the gospels say about Jesus contains some hyperbole, exaggeration for effect. Maybe Jesus didn't say everything the gospels say He said. Maybe Jesus exaggerated a little Himself, and even knew some tricks to get people's attention, like where the sandbars were and how to revive people that others might have thought really were dead. It is suggested that we who live in a more advanced world, in a more sophisticated society shouldn't be duped by such things. We are told to take Jesus' message about love and charity to heart, and then get to work.

Many still like the darkness rather than the light. Don't be fooled. Jesus is the Light of the world. He was sent by the Father to reveal to us the light of God's forgiving grace to reveal for us the

righteousness which comes to us from God. The Father also testifies, and His testimony was to be seen in the signs and wonders which Jesus performed. All these signs and wonders were foretold by the prophets in the Scriptures, along with many other testimonies of God's mercy and grace as He directed all history to the coming of the Christ. Jesus told the Pharisees:

**John 5:39** "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me."

They had the truth in their hands as they studied the Scriptures, but they refused to see the light because they loved the darkness of their own work righteousness better than the light. But that light shines bright and clear in the face of Jesus Christ!

## **II. Jesus Gives us the Light of Life.**

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, **but have the light of life.**"

Jesus has called us to follow Him. He has called us to faith in Him as Lord and Savior. He has given us the light of life. That light shines in our heart that we might know the glory of the Lord, and the glory of His cross. He has presented us with the forgiveness of all our sins. He has given us peace with God, and the sure hope of everlasting life. This is the light that shines in our hearts. Jesus has brought us into fellowship with the Father. What lies before us is glory, the glory that Jesus won for us with His redeeming blood.

Since we have been rescued from the darkness of sin, why would we ever again walk in the ways of the world? Why would we ever again walk down that dark path that can only lead to destruction? And yet that is the struggle we face in this life because of the sinful flesh that still rises up within us in rebellion against God. In our epistle lesson John made it clear that we cannot walk in darkness and claim to follow Jesus. If we do that we lie and do not practice the truth. Sin disrupts our fellowship with God. Sin alienates us from our Lord and Savior. Sin is serious and it is dangerous. Walking in sin is more than sin happening. It is embracing sin, including it our manner of life. That happens more easily than any of us would like to think, so don't breathe too great a sigh of relief

thinking this can't, or won't, or hasn't happened to me. It happens, and it is not only foolhardy, but extremely dangerous to your eternal life.

Jesus is the light of life. He has entered our hearts with His gospel. In the gospel He has given us the power to refuse our sinful lusts, to say "no" to sin, and "yes" to righteousness. And what about the sin that happens, and happens every day? Realize that this sin can only be removed by Jesus. **"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"** (1 John 1:9).

And that is where we begin and end every day. We see and confess our own sin and unworthiness. We turn to Jesus for cleansing and righteousness, and He leads us with His light, the saving light of the gospel. With His light He enlightens our dark hearts so we see His glory. With His light He directs us on the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. With His light we have the light of eternal life. This light that shines now in our hearts shall, by His grace, continue to shine within us unto the eternal day.

**AMEN.**

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.