

## Walking in the Light

1 John 1:5-10

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[Real Audio \(3 MB\)](#)

There is a lot of darkness in our world, and sometimes it envelops your life. When that happens, the goal isn't to get used to the darkness, to make sense of the darkness, or to figure out who is to blame for the darkness. The goal is to find some light.

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Periodically someone will ask me, "Why do we have to confess our sins every week? It is such a depressing way to begin a worship service." Actually, we don't begin with the confession of sin. We begin by quietly entering this house of God, which doesn't really look like your house. Then we hear a call to worship, and sing a hymn about the Immortal, Invisible God. Then we pray our adoration to this Holy God and hear a choral response of holy adoration. Now if you are paying attention to all of these ascriptions to holiness, the only reasonable reaction is to ask yourself, "What am I doing here?" Or in the words of the prophet Isaiah, "Woe is me. I am a man of unclean lips who lives among a people of unclean lips. What am I doing in the presence of God?" Then we confess our sins.

But we are not confessing all your sins. It's just one little paragraph. I mean, really. You've been busier than that this week. We are just inviting you to join those of us who throughout the ages have confessed that we are sinners who know we don't deserve to be in God's presence. We are here only by grace. That is what this church does: we proclaim grace for sinners.

Now some of you in the sanctuary are already wishing you had found something else to do this morning. The word "sin" alone makes you want to run out of the room, because you have spent a lot of time learning to like yourself again. You have worked hard at getting rid of the old messages from childhood that said you just weren't good enough, and you're sick and tired of being judged. So the last thing you want is to suffer through a "bad dog" sermon. For those of you in this group, I want to say that is not my goal today. But I have to remind you that your worst judge is the person who keeps showing up in the mirror, and you'll never outrun yourself.

Others of you think that the pastor might as well nail you like everyone else. You just naturally cower as authority figures scowl and say: "Bad dog! How could you do that?" For those in this group, I want to introduce you to the wonders of the gospel that free you from the judgments of the past. You are not just bad. You are what God created you to be, and he didn't make you bad. The ministry of grace will restore you that good creation.

Still others of you, and these are the ones who really scare me, think that it is high time the pastor got off this grace thing he's been on for years and let a little fire and brimstone fall down from the pulpit. But over the years I have discovered that people who love sermons on judgment think that I am not talking about them. "Him. He's the bad dog. Tell him, pastor. I've been trying for years." For those in this group, I want to say, you're in the wrong church.

I don't think it's going to change in a few weeks when I go. I know Dr. Tom Erickson, who the session has just called to be your interim pastor. I didn't recommend him, or anyone else, to be your interim. But I know Tom, and I was delighted when the session called him because I know he will do a wonderful job here. He is smart, wise, pastoral, a great leader and a terrific communicator. But he's not a bad dog preacher either. He is a minister of the grace of Jesus Christ, like I am and those who have gone before me were.

But none of us can explain the good news about the grace of God in Christ without talking about sin. In

part that is because without understanding sin, grace is sheer sentimentality. And in part, we have to talk about sin because in your heart you know you're a sinner, just like me. That's the fundamental human problem.

It is why fanatics fly airplanes into crowded skyscrapers, why evil men molest and kill little girls, and why greedy executives betray the trust of their stockholders. It is why even you and I do the most desperate things in our lives. It's this problem we have called sin.

When the Apostle Paul writes about sin, especially in Romans, he describes it as a breaking of God's laws. Even if you are not religious, you know these holy laws, he claims. They are written on all our hearts. The result of sin, Paul claims, is that we are separated from God. Being separated from the source of our life results in slowly dying -- from the inside out. Because "the wages of sin is death." But, Paul claims, the good news about Jesus Christ is that we are reconciled back to God. And "Nothing can ever separate from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Not even our own sin.

When the Apostle John writes about sin he describes it as a turning away from the light of God. And the result of turning toward this sin, John claims, is that we live in darkness.

Doesn't it seem that our society is a darker place this year? It is not that we were basking in the light of righteousness last year, but the evils of terrorism, anthrax, white collar crimes, abuse of minors, and forest fires being set by rangers, has left a dark cloud all around us. And yet the place where all this darkness originates is in the human heart.

I think our President is right: there is an axis of evil. But it is not limited to a few rogue nations. The real turning point of evil is in your and my darkened hearts. That's because, as Paul tells us, we know what is right. And as John tells us, we each turned from the light. The reason we turned was because we were frightened life wasn't turning out as we had hoped. So we became desperate, and took over, and committed sin, and managed our sin with more sin. Then we got too lost in the darkness of our own making.

When people are left in the dark, they tend to hold onto anything they can. Some cling to the security of their money, but lately the stock market has demonstrated that money is a dangerous source of security. Others cling to protestations that they are not to blame, which only makes them victims. Still others cling to a religious certainty that we're right and they're "pagans." But as the leaders of the Missouri Synod Church are discovering that just makes you look like something less than Jesus. What religion ought to be saying is that we are all stuck in the darkness, and we've all made our contributions to it.

The Apostle John won't leave us there. In the fourth verse of his first epistle he states, "We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete." In verse five he states that in God there is no darkness at all. And in verse six he states that if you want this inseparable fellowship with God, that Paul was describing, you can't walk in the darkness. In verse seven he says that the work of Christ on the cross can bring us back to the light. In verse eight he cautions that if we say we are not sinners, we are just kidding ourselves. Finally in verse nine, he thankfully states if we confess our sin that "He who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Why do we confess our sins near the beginning of worship every Sunday? Because when we tell the truth about ourselves, we can then hear the always deeper truth of God's Word: "In Jesus Christ we are forgiven." Another reason we always confess sin is that it opens up a place in our tightly managed, darkened lives. The light of Christ fills that space.

When God created the world, he did it with words. The first words were, "Let there be light," and the light shoved the darkness out of the way making room for beauty. Similarly, when John began his gospel he said, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." That is how John begins the story of Jesus Christ, not with nativity narratives, but by identifying Jesus with the creative Word of God that said, "Let there be light." As John continues, "In him was life and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:1-5). Who is Jesus Christ? The light of your life, the creative light of the world that is stronger than the sin of

our lives.

When you confess you have been living in the dark and ask to receive the forgiveness of God offered on the cross of Jesus Christ, the light shines in your life. Then, as Jesus said, you become the light of the world (Matthew 5:14).

Who will pierce the dark cloud we find ourselves in today? You will. You don't have to keep stumbling around in the dark. You can walk in the light as one who is forgiven, and people who know they are forgiven are free from the consuming focus of managing guilt and are now able to do the most extraordinary things in the world.

All the truly heroic persons in the history of the church had some great flaw in their lives: Paul, John, Augustine, Francis, Luther, Calvin, John XXIII, Martin Luther King, Mother Theresa, and the list goes on and on. When you study any of them closely, you find this fundamental flaw. The thing that made them great was not they controlled this flaw, but they found a redemption for it.

There is also a dark flaw in your life called sin. As John tells us, if you cover it up you are just deceiving yourself, and that will only lead you further into the darkness. But if you confess, you will find the grace of Christ filling your life with creative light. That will make your joy complete by turning you into a ray of light that can shine. And our darkened world needs you to be light.

O God, it is so hard to see in the dark. We can't even see you. So by grace, bring to us the forgiving salvation of your Son, that we may reflect his creative light that casts aside all darkness. Amen.