

Drawn to Dawn
Rev. Nicole Farley
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
March 26, 2017

Ephesians 5:8-14

⁸For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—
⁹for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; ¹³but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,
‘Sleeper, awake!
Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.’

John 9:1-41

¹ As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ ³Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’ ⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, ⁷saying to him, ‘Go, wash in the pool of Siloam’ (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, ‘Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?’ ⁹Some were saying, ‘It is he.’ Others were saying, ‘No, but it is someone like him.’ He kept saying, ‘I am the man.’ ¹⁰But they kept asking him, ‘Then how were your eyes opened?’ ¹¹He answered, ‘The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, “Go to Siloam and wash.” Then I went and washed and received my sight.’ ¹²They said to him, ‘Where is he?’ He said, ‘I do not know.’

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, ‘He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.’ ¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, ‘This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.’ But others said, ‘How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?’ And they were divided. ¹⁷So they said again to the blind man, ‘What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.’ He said, ‘He is a prophet.’

¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹and asked them, ‘Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?’ ²⁰His parents answered, ‘We know that

this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.’ ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.

²³Therefore his parents said, ‘He is of age; ask him.’

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, ‘Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.’ ²⁵He answered, ‘I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.’ ²⁶They said to him, ‘What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?’ ²⁷He answered them, ‘I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?’ ²⁸Then they reviled him, saying, ‘You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.’ ³⁰The man answered, ‘Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³²Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.’ ³⁴They answered him, ‘You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?’ And they drove him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ ³⁶He answered, ‘And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.’ ³⁷Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.’ ³⁸He said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshipped him. ³⁹Jesus said, ‘I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.’ ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, ‘Surely we are not blind, are we?’ ⁴¹Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, “We see,” your sin remains.

Our readings today make me uncomfortable. The author of the letter to the Ephesians tells me that once I was darkness but now, in the Lord, I am light. But I don’t **feel** like that. And yet, who would say that out loud when the reading continues with “For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly.” To me, this is a dangerous approach to encouragement here and now, one that may have worked during the time of that specific blend of culture, faith, and philosophy of self, plus who knows what other factors. What I see today, though, is that, rather than admit we don’t exactly feel like children of the light, light itself, we’re sure not going to let on lest someone think we have shameful secrets. Instead we put on brave faces and console ourselves in our private trying (or we

despair in our private failings), not realizing that we have a great deal of company, people surrounding us on every side who are just as fearful of admitting that they don't feel like children of the light. This doesn't exactly foster a supportive community of believers - we're glad to support one another, certainly - but we can't support people for the struggles we don't know. The light is there but we hide in our darkness, pretending we have no darkness, so our pretending keeps us from the real thing. And that's just our first reading.

In our second reading, Jesus heals a blind man, something no one around him can recall ever happening before, a truly life-changing encounter with Jesus. And then everyone around the man bails on him, throws him under the bus, leaves him hanging. To save their own skins, they refuse to say what must be true - that Jesus must be from God - because doing so would cause them to be ejected from their communities. There can be no rejoicing for this man because it would involve too much risk, loss of status, loss of income, loss of relationship, loss of community. They have a perfect invitation to leave darkness behind and head to light, but they turn it down. A completely different way of being an unsupportive community of believers.

These make me uncomfortable because I can be found in both of these situations: sometimes not admitting that I don't have it all together, limiting the ways others can engage with me, and sometimes not risking myself to celebrate someone else's good news, limiting the ways I engage with others. But there is good news in this discomfort, in all of our discomfort. Really. The discomfort signifies that we know there is something more right than our current realities, there is something else we hope for, something else we strive toward. It means that we are still being drawn toward the light. We still are pulled to something better, richer, deeper, fuller, brighter. Even the Pharisees were.

“Jesus said, ‘I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.’ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, ‘Surely we are not blind, are we?’” They wanted Jesus to tell them they were right but, before they even asked, they knew. It was out of their discomfort that they asked him the question in the first place. And Jesus simply affirmed what they suspected - “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains” - in

essence, you have work to do. You are pretending you have no darkness, but I see it. If you really were full of light, you would be blinded by it.

Here's the thing, friends, Jesus already knows we want better and brighter; we **trust** he is guiding us to it. **BUT WE NEED TO FOLLOW HIM THERE.** Pretending is a stumbling block. Risk-aversion is a stumbling block. Last summer we explored Joan S. Gray's book, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers: A Handbook*, and I focused on this quote one week: "Effective spiritual leaders know that in the church, success is about faithfulness, and faithfulness sometimes requires taking risks. These leaders...are willing...to take a leap of faith when it seems necessary to do God's will."¹ Then I was tying this to God's will for the church but it is just as true to God's will for us. God's will, heard through Ephesians, is that we awaken and rise from the dead so that Christ's light shines on us, and through us. We must risk the truth of ourselves and we must risk ourselves for others so that Christ's light shines on us, and through us. We are continually drawn to the dawn of Christ's light, and ignoring it brings us discomfort.

If I were your physical trainer, I'd tell you to lean into that discomfort. If I were your therapist, I'd suggest you explore that discomfort. Because I'm your pastor, I encourage you to listen to that discomfort. What are you, what are we, doing or not doing that is keeping us from following Christ to light? May the Spirit of wisdom and understanding be with us all while we listen.

Let us pray: God of light, remove from us the words "We see" until we really, truly do, we pray. Amen.

¹ Joan S. Gray, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers: A Handbook* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2009); p. 71.