

September 18, 2011
 First Baptist Vancouver

Text: Ephesians 5:3-14

Title: "When Jesus Shines On You"

[Series: "Navigating An Alternative Reading of Reality"]

So, how do you respond to this text? What is your initial reaction to this part of the letter the apostle Paul, "the apostle of grace," as he is called, wrote to the disciples of Jesus living in the first century city of Ephesus? Some of you, would, I imagine, say, "Oh man, I get enough negative noise from others ... I do not need this today." Others of you, would, I imagine, say, "No wonder people like reading the Bible anymore." Still others, "It is about time someone said some hard things ... this is exactly why our world is going down the tubes." Still others, "I already know I am not living the kind of life I ought to ... this just makes me feel worse." And others, "Wow, like this is getting much too close; this text is invading private places of my life; I think I will just tune out right now."

I understand all those initial reactions. And I submit to you that if you will give the text a hearing, if you will let the text do what I think the apostle Paul wrote it to do, you will discover that the text is wonderfully liberating. You will discover that the text is full of Gospel, full of good news. It is? Yes, it is!

You see, the text is simply illustrating what happens when Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, shines on us, shines on you, shines on me. In the last verse of the text, in verse 14, Paul writes, "For this reason it says ..." "For this reason" is Paul's way of under-girding what he has developed before the "For this reason." "For this reason it says, 'Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'"

What Paul addresses in the text before the "For this reason," are the kinds of things from which sleepers awake, from which the dead arise when Christ, when Messiah, shines on sleepy, dead human beings. "For this reason it says." "It says." What says? Most of the time when Paul, or other writers of the New Testament, use the phrase "it says," he, and they, are quoting Scripture, which for them at that moment in history was only the Old Testament. But there is no Old Testament text that says,

"Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Many Biblical scholars suggest that what we have in Ephesians 5:14 is an early Christian hymn, an early Christian worship song. The fact is that in the NT we have a number of such hymns. Philippians 2, verses 5-11, with which we worked last Sunday when wrestling with Paul's exhortation, "Therefore, be imitators of God" (5:1). "Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus, Who, because He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to take advantage of, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of humanity. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by being obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God highly exalted Him, and stowed on Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should

bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

I have often wondered what tune the church used to sing that song! There is the hymn in Colossians 1, verses 15-20, which got a hold on me when I was in University studying Theoretical Physics and Mathematics. “And He (Jesus Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For by Him all things were created, in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also the head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first born from the dead; so that He might come to have first place in all things.” And on it goes! Oh to know what that song sounded like when sung in the cities of the Roman Empire. There is the hymn in 1 Timothy 3:16, what Paul calls “The Mystery of Godliness:” “He Who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Beheld by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.” All these examples of early Christian hymns have worked their way into congregational worship throughout Church history.

And there is the hymn, or more accurately, chorus, in the letter to the Ephesians. Likely sung when someone was baptized. And at other times as well; but especially appropriate to sing over believers as they emerge from the waters of baptism. “Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” I would love to know how that was sung in the church in Ephesus.

Last Tuesday, when we were planning today’s worship service, Andrea Tisher got the idea to put it to music what her heart senses might be the way it was sung. Andrea – would you share what came to you? Now, even though Paul is not directly quoting a Biblical text when he says, “For this reason it says,” he is likely incorporating a number of different OT texts. Like Isaiah 9, verse 2: “The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them.” Which leads up to the great Christmas text I can hardly wait to preach, “For unto us a Child is born, unto to us a son is given ...” (9:7). And Isaiah 60, verses 1 & 2: “Arise and shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth, and deep darkness the peoples; But the LORD will rise upon you, and His glory will appear upon you.” [Other texts: Isaiah 26:19; 51:17; 52:1; 60:19-20] This was the expectation of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, who when his son was born sang of another Son, Mary’s Son, saying, “the Sunrise from on high shall visit us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:78-79) into the way of Shalom, of wholeness. All of which is taken up in the chorus Paul cites in his letter. And the big point I want to make about this hymn/chorus is that it under-girds all that comes before Paul re-cites it. From chapter 5, verse 3 to verse 13, Paul is simply opening up for us what happens when Christ wakes us from mental and spiritual sleep, when Christ raises up from mental and spiritual death, when Christ shines on us.

When He does, says Paul, “all things become visible” – verse 13. We begin to see things clearly. “All things become visible when they are exposed by the light.” I love it when new believers, fresh from a saving encounter with Jesus, say things like, “Where have I been all my life? I see things I never saw before.” As a 19th century hymn sings, “Something lives in every hue Christ-less eyes have never seen.” We begin to see the

world clearly; which brings both joy and sorrow. We begin to see ourselves clearly; which also brings both joy and sorrow. We begin to see the actions of governments and corporations clearly: which, depending on whether those in leadership see, either discourages or encourages us. And we begin to see God clearly. Which brings us a whole host of emotions! “All things become visible when they are exposed by the light.”

“Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Sing.

When He does, says Paul, we become light. Amazing! Verse 8 – “for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.” Not, “for you formerly lived in darkness, but now you live in light,” though that would be a true thing to say. But, “you were darkness, but now you are light.” Again, amazing! I am not sure of all the apostle has in mind in this claim. But I have witnessed it ... again and again. When a person comes to Christ ... or, as I should say, when Christ comes to a person, upon a person ... and makes all things visible, the light radiates out of them, in their eyes, on their skin. You have seen it, have you not? Why the glow wears off is another matter. But it is there. And people say to the new believer, “There is something different about you. I can see it on you. You are different.” Not perfect but different. We, in some sense, “become light.” In union with the Light, in intimacy with the Light of the world, we become, in some sense, light. The fact is, we do slowly become like that to which we are constantly exposed. Be exposed to the very Light of Life and there is a sense in which we become light.

“Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Sing.

When He does, says Paul, we want to be clean, like He is clean. Verse 3 – “But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints.” In the verse right before Paul calls us to “walk in love” (5:2). The opposite of love in immorality, impurity, greed. The word he uses which we translate “immorality” is ‘porniea’ which comes into the English language in words like “pornography.” One of the biggest industries in our time, funded by corporations you would be shocked to have named. Which is eating away at the soul of our world. Causing a lot of people to go to sleep mentally and spiritually, causing a lot of relational death. The Light of Life breaks the spell. Thanks be to Him! He breaks through the darkness, grabs hold of our souls, and leads us into freedom.

He breaks the spell of greed. Same word translated “covetousness.” The 10th commandment: “You shall not covet your neighbour’s house, or your neighbour’s wife ...” A lot of money fuels greed and coveting. But when Christ shines, things begin to change. We discover, sometimes to our horror, that Paul is right: coveting is idolatry. Verse 5 – “the covetous person is an idolater.” We make a god out of that which we covet. We “have to have” the thing or person ... and all of life revolves around getting that thing or person. Please Lord, shine! Radiate through all our idolatry; we do not want to be living for false gods.

“Awake, sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Sing.

When He does, says Paul, the way we speak begins to change. Verse 4 - There must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jutting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks." He is referring to humor that is used to put other people down. He is referring to obscenity and vulgarity. All of it out of sync with love. John Stott put it so well: "The reason why Christians should dislike and avoid vulgarity is not because we have a warped view of sex, and we are either ashamed or afraid of it, but because we have a high and holy view of it as being in its right place God's gift, which we do not want to see cheapened" (God's New Society).

Interestingly, Paul sees as an antidote to foul and mean speech, the giving of thanks. Why? Because giving thanks for other people makes us realize again that they are God's creation; giving thanks makes us treat them as His gifts.

No one in his or her right mind - in the light! - wants to denigrate something God has made. Gratitude powerfully checks the instinct of lust and covetousness and sarcasm. When the Light goes on life is experienced as gift. Especially people. Yes, some are problematic. And we want to give them names that express what a problem they can be! But using such speech never achieves anything. And it can rot our own souls. Giving thanks keeps things in perspective.

"Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Sing.

When He does, says Paul, the Kingdom of God becomes more real to us, and we want to live consistent with the Kingdom. Verse 5 - "For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." Paul is not referring to momentary lapses; he is referring to deliberate, intentionally repeated, settled choices.

Why "no inheritance" in the kingdom? Because, thank God, the kingdom is all about wholeness, and righteousness, and goodness and beauty. The further into the kingdom we go...or, I should say, the further into the kingdom Jesus draws us ...the more we realize how good it is, and the more we find everything incongruous with the kingdom odious ... and we want it to be taken away. This partly explains why when we get serious about following Jesus into the Kingdom of God things begin to be uncomfortable.

The kingdom values are coming up against the values nurtured by greed and lust and fear, and our worlds are being turned up-side-down ...which, thankfully, means, our worlds are being turned right-side up again!

"Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Sing.

When He does, says Paul, we understand one of the reasons for so much of the turmoil in our world today. The wrath of God. Verse 6 - "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things, the wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience." Up to this point in his letter the apostle of grace has been celebrating grace. "Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (1:3). Everything has been about God's goodness and mercy and grace. Why then bring up "wrath"? The wrath of God is

not what so many think it is. It is not God throwing lightning and thunder-bolts at human beings whom He finds disgusting. No, the wrath of God is, as Australian scholar Leon Morris, helped me see, is God's settled opposition to all that is incongruous with His love and holiness. And it is expressed in letting us have our way. The wrath of God is God letting us have our way. It is awful. I would rather get lightning and thunder-bolts. The wrath of God is God giving us up to the full implications of not wanting Him and His ways. When God sees that a person or nation has finally chosen not to choose Him and His ways, He lets the person or nation have their way. Christ shines on us to help us realize just how critical what we do with Him is. Choose other gods – like pornography or violence or racism or consumerism – and we become like them. That is wrath. And the God of grace shines the Light of Life into the darkness so we realize how consequential human decisions really are.

“Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Sing.

When He does, says Paul, our ambitions change, and we simply want to please Him. Verse 8 : “Walk as children of the light, ..., trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.” Of course! When the Light goes on we want to live in sync with Him. In every realm of life – “Lord, what pleases You?” In our work – “what pleases You?” In our relationships – “what pleases You?” In entertainment and sports – “what pleases You?” In the books we read, the movie we chose to watch – “what pleases You?” In the way we spend His money – “what pleases You?” “What pleases You?” When the Light goes on you want, as never before, to live in full harmony with Him.

“Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Sing.

When He does, says Paul, the world around you is affected. How can it be otherwise? Verse 7 - “And do not be partakers with them ...” Verse 11 – “And do not partake in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead expose them.” He does not say what some have made him out to say; he does not say, “do not associate with them.” That is neither possible ... nor pleasing to the Lord. For how will people know the love of God if those who know Him remain in holy-huddles? What Paul says is, “Do not partake ... do not participate.” And, even, “expose.” Not the persons. But the deeds. Big distinction. The Light shines not to expose people. But to expose the deeds that are ruining people.

As those who “walk in the light” walk in dark places, dark deeds and attitudes and schemes are exposed. Sometimes by “children of the light” speaking into the dark deeds. As the churches in our city and world may need to do soon regarding the horrific phenomenon of sex trafficking. This is supposed to be an enlightened world: how in heaven's name can such a thing be happening? I cannot begin to imagine the pain little girls suffer: being abducted from their homelands, sold to strangers, used by grown men. And I cannot begin to imagine how dark must be the souls of those who do it. Can you imagine being that dark? Barely human. Expose the practice, Jesus! Burn your Light into such inhumanity. And use us if You need to.

But the exposure happens mostly by “children of the light” simply showing up; their mere presence brings conviction about the deeds of darkness. I still remember one

of the last times I went skiing –15 years ago now. My sons had gotten into their gondola chair, and I took to one that followed, sitting with a young woman I did not know. All the way up the mountain she was going on and on about the party she was going to that night. She spoke enthusiastically about all the drinking that would take place, and about the “good sex” she was hoping to have. I just listen ... and pray! On and on she goes ... celebrating all this non-kingdom stuff. Then just before we reach the top, she asks what I do for a living. And I thought, ok Lord, here it comes. “I am a Christian pastor,” I said, gently. She flipped out! “Oh my God!” she starts saying. I asked the Lord to credit her words as a prayer. “Oh, my God! If I had known I would not have said everything I have just said.” She was in misery. Or better, in “severe mercy.” She could hardly wait till we reached the top. As she readied herself to leave the chair and ski down the hill, I said, “He knows, you know.” Off she flew; really fast. I look forward to meeting her again in the fully realized kingdom; for the deep sense of conviction that came upon her had to finally lead her to the Saviour.

“Awake, sleeper, And rise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you.” Sing.

And when He does we experience a desperate need for God. We realize that we cannot be alive and whole without God. Paul does not say so in the text. But all he says leads us there. There is no way we can live free and clean without God; without the Father, without the Lord Jesus, without the Holy Spirit. Do you know the name Douglas Coupland (pronounced Cope-lund)? He is the creative Canadian novelist, who first introduced terms like “McJob” and “Generation X.” Towards the end of a collection of essays entitled *After God*, Coupland writes this:

“Now – here is my secret: I speak to you with an openness of heart that I doubt I will ever achieve again, so I pray that you are in a quiet room as you hear these words. My secret is that I need God –that I am sick and can no longer make it alone. I need God to help me give, because I no longer seem to be capable of giving; to help me be kind, as I no longer seem capable of kindness; to help me love, as I seem beyond being able to love” (360).

Yes! Yes! Yes!

The Light is shining! Jesus Christ the Light is shining! A sleeper is waking up! A human being is rising from the dead! It is the spiritually and mentally asleep who see no need for God. The dead feel no need for God. It is when the Light breaks through that a human being is finally human –desperately needing and wanting God. “Blessed are the poor in spirit ...for theirs is the Kingdom.”

Type in the texts of “Jesus, Be The Centre” and “Shine Jesus, Shine!”