

Ephesians 5:8-14 Pastor Bill Uetricht 4/02/11 4 Lent

“Wake up, sleeper, rise up from the dead!  
Wake up, sleeper, get up from your bed!  
Wake up, sleeper, rise up from the dead!  
Wake up, sleeper, get up from your bed!  
Wake up, sleeper, rise up from the dead!

Wake up, sleeper, chase away the night!  
Wake up, sleeper, Christ will be the light!  
Wake up, sleeper, chase away the night!  
Wake up, sleeper, Christ will be the light!  
Wake up, sleeper, chase away the night!

Wake up, sleeper! Wake up sleeper!  
Wake up, sleeper! Wake up sleeper!  
Wake up, sleeper! Rise up from the dead!”

(This song written by John Ylvisaker was sung.)

The words of this song were inspired by our reading from Ephesians for today. The author of this reading, probably a disciple of the Apostle Paul, concludes our second reading with this quote that encourages the sleeper to wake up, the dead to be raised. No one seems to know exactly where this quote came from. It certainly is not from the Old Testament. Some scholars believe that it may have been used by the early church as a part of their baptismal liturgy, something that I find intriguing (and something, therefore, I used in our baptismal service today). When people were baptized, it appears, they were told that they had been awakened from sleep, raised from the dead.

William Loader, an Australian religious thinker, concludes then that “baptism is a very big agenda.”

Baptism is not a sweet ceremony that elicits only smiles and pictures. It is not a once-upon-a-time occasion that means only an infrequent nod to a memory. It is not a rite that has merely to do with the next life, saving a person from the flames of hell. No, baptism is the overwhelming experience of the Christian life, this life. Loader is right. Baptism is a very big agenda. Baptism is about being awakened from sleep, being raised from the dead, being transported from reality to another.

The author of Ephesians, addressing what probably were new, non-Jewish Christians, tells them: “For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light.” The image is of baptism transferring these new believers from the realm of darkness into the realm of light. They—can I say, we, since we are the baptized--have entered a whole new world. We have been given a whole new identity. We are light.

Now note. It is not said that we will become light if we only . . . work hard enough at it, join six church committees, get our family life together, do away with all of our bad thoughts. No, we **are** light. Through baptism, we *have been* taken to a whole new realm. Light is our God-given identity. We *have* died with Christ. We *have been* raised with him. Being told to wake up and to get up out of the grave is a reminder to be who we already are. We are those who have been awakened to new life in Christ. We are those who have been raised from the dead, have been given a big identity. God has brought us into a whole new world.

Now, the author of Ephesians says, we should live like it. “Live as children of light,” he says. Baptism’s big agenda is to involve the

entirety of the life that we live. The reality of our identity in baptism is to penetrate every part of our lives, even the secret parts. The writer of Ephesians says, “Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. It is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly, for everything exposed by the light becomes visible.”

To be who we are as children of the light means allowing the light to shine on our secrets, allowing the light to penetrate our secret selves. Oh, there is so much that we keep from the light. There is much ugliness that is allowed to go on in our lives because we won't allow the light to shine on that ugliness. There is no doubt but that the author of Ephesians has sexual matters in mind as he talks about the shameful things that people do in secret. And there is no doubt but that sexual realities are major sources for the brokenness and pain that too many of us know. Sexual abuse is often a secret that many families, many congregations, church bodies, or societies hide. Yet the secret gives shape to the life of every one of those systems, a shaping that isn't always healthy.

The author of Ephesians says that the light needs to shine on our secrets, on the selves and the stuff that we would rather hide. Baptism's very big agenda includes our deepest and darkest places. To be children of light is to allow the light to shine on evil, to shine on the places where abuse and misuse of people prevail.

And to be children of light is not to participate in the unfruitful works of darkness that create the abuse and misuse of other people. We are light. Why would we want to participate in those things that tear people down, that use people, that turn people into objects, rather than the loved human beings that they are? I was intrigued by

Thursday's headline of **USA Today**: "Is Dating a Thing of the Past?" The article discussed the reality practiced by some college-age students known as "hooking up"—a practice that avoids long-term relationships for the sake of brief, short-term encounters. For some, the article suggests, longer-term relationships are too much hassle.

Now I am no prude. Nor am I unfamiliar with the complexities that those of us who live in the twenty-first century face. The economy has radically changed. We are a much more mobile people. Pursuits of careers in the modern world often mean lives that are much less static, probably more unpredictable. But we who are light, we who have been raised from the dead with Christ, see people as others who also are light. We who have been awakened to new life in Christ refuse to treat people as if they are an intrusion into life, as if they are objects for our momentary pleasure. For us who are light, sex is not a commodity that is to be sold on the marketplace of relationships. It is an expression of the deepest love that two people committed to each other share. Other people are not objects for our use or abuse. They, too, like us, are light. They, too, like us, are the recipients of the compassion of God. They, too, have status and dignity. We then need to view them as who they are. Our vision needs to be corrected so that we see them for who they are.

One of the startling portions of the long gospel lesson that we shared today is the argument that the neighbors enter into over whether the man who was healed of his blindness truly is the man whom they knew as the one who had been blind since birth. Some of the neighbors ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some say, "Yes, he is the guy," while others say, "No, it is someone like him." Haven't these neighbors known him forever? Did they not regularly

walk by him when he was begging on the street? Why aren't they sure about who he is?

Maybe they never looked this beggar in the eyes. Maybe they just walked by him, didn't look at him in the face. Maybe if they avoided his face, they would not have to deal with his reality. Maybe then, they wouldn't have to be changed themselves, have to do something about his condition.

We who are children of the light, we who have been transferred out of the realm of darkness into the realm of never-ending light, we who have died with Christ and have been raised with him, we who have been awakened into life in Christ, look at people in their faces, look at them in their eyes, look at them not as problems to be overcome, objects to be used, pains to be endured, charity cases to be taken care of, but rather gifts to be received, sojourners with us in this journey we call life.

You once were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light. Wake up, sleeper! Rise up from the dead! Wake up sleeper! Chase away the night; Christ is your light!