

# FOURTH SUNDAY



IN LENT

## ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH

Stratford, Ontario

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LENT 4

March 22, 2020

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A different form of the bulletin to keep you in touch. We thought you may appreciate the readings and gospel for this the Fourth Sunday in Lent.

Prayer of the Day:

**Bend your ear to our prayers, Lord Christ, and come among us. By your gracious life and death for us, bring light into the darkness of our hearts, and anoint us with your Spirit, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**

### WORD

#### First Reading:

A Reading from the First Book of Samuel

*The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, "I have come to sacrifice to the Lord." Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the Lord came mightily upon David from that day*

forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

### Psalm 23

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters. He revives my soul and guides me along right pathways for his name's sake. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me; you have anointed my head with oil, and my cup is running over. Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*

### Second Reading:

A reading from the Letter of Paul to the Ephesians

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

### Gospel:

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

*As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He 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." They said to him, "where is he?" He said, "I do not know." They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then 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." Some 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. So 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." 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 and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind?" How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but 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." His 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. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." 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." He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He 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?" Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out. Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshipped him. Jesus, 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." Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see," your sin remains."*

John 9:1-41

Sermon:

Ephesians 5:8-14

Pastor Jeff Laustsen

### **“This Little Light of Mine”**

“Live as children of light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.”

One of my most vivid memories from my childhood in New Jersey was the Great Blackout of 1965. A power outage on November 9 of that year left about 30 million people without electricity in the eastern United States for about 12 hours, the largest power failure in history up to that point. It happened suddenly and without warning; my parents and I were watching television at home when the power failure left our home in darkness. We scrambled to find candles, flashlights, and a transistor radio so that we had some light and could find out what was happening from the one local radio station that remained on the air. We could see dim light in our neighbors' windows as they also struggled to find a source of light in the darkness that fell upon our community. It was a strange and disturbing experience, but it made me appreciate how one light in the midst of darkness can make all the difference; even though the candles and flashlights were no substitute for our electric lights, their presence was a source of comfort that got us through the darkest night of my childhood.

This experience from my childhood was not the only blackout I've experienced in my life. On August 14, 2003, another blackout on the East Coast affected over 50 million people. It was our first year on Long Island, and it gave us an opportunity to meet some of our neighbors who gathered outside their homes on a hot summer night (a night when the operator of the Mister Softee ice cream truck probably made record profits!). A more serious power failure was in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy in October of 2012; our community was without power for three days, and some other towns on Long Island had no

electricity for over two weeks. Again, the candles and lanterns that lit our homes were a poor replacement for our electrical lighting, but one small light in total darkness made all the difference. The significance of light shining in the darkness is a major metaphor throughout the Bible. The first act of creation in Genesis is the creation of light: *“The God said, ‘Let there be light; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.”* (Genesis 1:3-4). In the midst of the plague of darkness that covered *“all the land of Egypt for three days ... People could not see one another, and for three days they could not move from where they were; but all the Israelites had light where they lived.”* (Exodus 10:22-23). The psalmists called on God to *“let the light of your face shine on us, O LORD!”* (Psalm 4:6) and praised God for the Word that is *“a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”* (Psalm 119:105). The prophet Isaiah invited the people of God to *“come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!”* (Isaiah 2:5) and to *“arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.”* (Isaiah 60:1).

The prophecies of the coming of the light of the Lord are fulfilled for Christians in the coming of Christ, whose birth was lauded by Simeon as *“a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”* (Luke 2:32). The Gospel of John identifies John the Baptist as the one who *“came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.”* (John 1:7-8). The *“life [that] was the light of all people”* is Jesus Christ, who proclaims that *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”* (John 8:12). The one who is the *“light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it”* (John 1:5) teaches his disciples that their mission is to be bearers of this divine light to the world:

- “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” – Matthew 5:14-16.

The call of God’s people to be bearers of the light of Christ is a central part of the message of the letter to the Ephesians. This letter was addressed to the churches in the port city of Ephesus, a major commercial center on the west coast of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) whose churches were among the most prominent in the First Century (another Pauline letter is addressed to Timothy, a pastor in Ephesus; and Ephesus is one of the seven churches that are addressed in the book of Revelation). Many believe that the letter to the Ephesians was a circular letter, read both in Ephesus as well as in other churches in the region, and is therefore more general in tone than letters that are addressed to specific individuals and communities (such as the letters to the Corinthians or epistles to Philemon, Timothy, and Titus). The six chapters of the letter are divided evenly between a proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ (*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.”* – 1:3-4) and how Christians live their faith in their life together and in the world that is often hostile to the Gospel message (*“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”* – 5:1-2).

- “The author of Ephesians, whose identity is a source of great scholarly debate, spend much of this circular letter to the churches counseling the churches on the ethics that follow from the ecclesiology in which the church is adopted into the family of God.” – Margaret Aymer.

The contrast between past and present is a central theme in Ephesians, including the contrast between the darkness of life before Christ and the present life with Christ. The apostles contrasts our past life in which “*you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers and aliens to the covenant promise, having no hope and without God in the world*” (2:12) with the present in which “*now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*” (2:13), who has “*abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.*” (2:15-16). In the words of another apostle, “*once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*” (1 Peter 2:10).

The apostle employs the biblical metaphor of light and darkness to reinforce his message about the transformation of the past to the present through the cross and resurrection of Christ. He has used these images earlier in both parts of the letter, in speaking of the light that is bestowed upon God’s people through the gift of faith in Christ and the darkness of the world that they are to shun:

- “I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as your come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.” – 1:17-19.
- “Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart.” – 4:17-18.

The contrast between the darkness of our past lives and the light of our lives in Christ is central to the apostle’s teaching in today’s second lesson, in which he teaches what it means to be living in the light of Christ: “*For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light – for the fruit of the Lord is found in all that is good and right and true.*” (5:8-9). The new being of saints is manifested in new conduct; their resurrection from the dead produces good fruit. They are called to live as children of light in the midst of “*the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*” (6:12). The current state of affairs under which the Christian churches find themselves is a state of affairs not so much dictated by persons and personalities but by “cosmic powers” and “spiritual forces of evil” that work to the detriment of God’s people.

- “Ephesians does not choose to vilify any particular human being as the source of the church’s troubles, but rather sees the difficulties that Christians faced as a battle between the forces of good and evil. Indeed, two verses after this proper, the author warns the early churches that ‘the days’ in which they do their ministry ‘are evil’ [5:16].” – Aymer.

The light of Christ into which the people have been incorporated produces “children of light” who in turn produce “the fruit of the light”; it creates persons who believe as creatures of light and as witnesses to it. This light is embodied in a life that is “*good and right and true*,” in people who “*try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord*.” It seeks to embody the “fruits of the Spirit” that Paul describes in Galatians as “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*.” (Galatians 5:22-23). It seeks to fulfill Christ’s commandment to “*love one another as I have loved you*” (John 15:12), for “*by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*.” (John 13:35). It seeks to be faithful to our calling to be “*ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*.” (2 Corinthians 5:20-21).

- “Life in this light means to learn continually the will of the Lord and to put to shame the unproductive, hidden works of ‘darkness.’ The revelatory power of light is not only informative but also transformative; by exposing the realm of evil, light overcomes its power and turns into light, creates answer and serves all who are captive to darkness.” – Markus Barth.

The call to be “children of light” amid the darkness of the present age is especially relevant in a world that has been plunged suddenly and unexpectedly into the new reality of the COVID-19 pandemic. None of us was prepared for what we are currently experiencing; phrases like “social distancing,” “flattening the curve,” and “home quarantine” have entered our vocabulary, and coming to terms with being isolated from family and friends is causing great fear and distress throughout our society. All may appear to be well when we look out our windows, but we know that an unseen but deadly virus has taken hold of our world and is threatening the physical, emotional, and financial health of families and communities. What we once took for granted – getting together with friends for coffee, going shopping downtown, gathering for worship on Sunday – is now no longer possible. The sun may be shining, but the world in which we live feels very dark. It is precisely in the midst of the current darkness that we have the message that will transform fear into hope and darkness into light, because we are the bearers of the “light of the world” that is Jesus Christ. We bear the good news that “*God is light and in him there is no darkness at all*” (1 John 1:5), that the light of Christ “*shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it*.” (John 1:5). We are called to be “children of the light” in both word and deed: reaching out to persons feeling alone and isolated, praying for health care workers who are on the front lines of the battle against COVID-19, contributing to the House of Blessing and other agencies that continue to care for the needs of persons in our community, being voices of hope in the midst of fear, grounding ourselves in the firm foundation of God’s Word that ensures us that “*neither life nor death shall ever part from the Lord his children sever*.” Now more than ever, we need to make certain that as children of light we commit ourselves to the words we first sang as children: “*This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine!*”

- “We must cling to the Word with our whole hearts and find strength in his precious promise that he will be with us in union with the Father, shielding us so that no calamity shall harm us and no power of the world or the devil shall oppress us or snatch us from his hands. Thus we always find joy and comfort, growing happier and happier, letting no suffering or opposition dismay us or make us despair ... this is a joy without end (as it is grounded in the eternal), and in the midst of outward calamity it stands and grows” – Martin Luther.

*“One light in a dark valley ... For all eternity light it up, Lord, let is shine.”* (Harry Chapin).

As one light in a darkened room makes all the difference, the light of Christ that shines through us as God’s “children of light” will make all the difference in the darkness of these present days. May the promise we made as children be one that we embody every day: may *“this little light of mine”* be the light of Christ that *“I’m gonna shine for everyone; I’m gonna let it shine!”*

Amen.

Anthem: “Love Consecrates the Humblest Act”

(Click the link below for a setting of the lyrics; shrink the you tube screen and follow along with the lyrics below)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pj1j7D6RDMI>

Love consecrates the humblest act  
And hallows mercy's deeds;  
It sheds a benediction sweet  
And Hallows human needs.

When in the shadow of the cross  
Christ knelt and washed the feet  
Of his disciples, he gave us  
A sign of love complete.

Love serves and willing stoops to serve;  
What Christ in love so true  
Has freely done for one and all,  
Let us now gladly do.

**CANCELLATION**  
**REMINDER**  
**ALL EVENTS**  
**HAVE BEEN CANCELLED**  
**UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE**

Today's bulletin is sponsored by Wendy Hansen and family, in loving memory of Doug Hansen,  
+March 26, 2016.

**EASTER FLOWERS:** As is our custom, at Zion, donations will be accepted so the **Women of Faith** group can purchase flowers and decorate the church for our Easter celebrations. Please write "**Easter Flowers**" and **your name on a separate envelope**. You may either bring your envelope to the Church office any weekday between 8 AM and 1:30 PM or place it in the mailbox. Donations will be accepted up until **Sunday, April 5**. Thank you!

**THIS WEEK WE PRAY:**

>for our members and friends with special needs: Heather Wickenheiser, Margaret Wolfe, Ingrid Fraser, Rose Marie Schwalm, Nya Jimenez, Muriel Riehl, Karen Mogk, Ron Frank, Brian Gropp, Kolby McLeod.  
>for our congregation and community as it deals with the fear and uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic.  
>for front-line health care workers who are providing medical assistance to persons infected with the COVID-19 virus.  
>for medical researchers who are working on treatments and vaccines for the COVID-19 virus.  
>for the most vulnerable members of our community, that we may continue to reach out to them to provide for their needs during this outbreak.  
>for police, firefighters, government officials, and all who are serving in our community during this outbreak.  
>for the faith that is ours in Jesus Christ to live in trust and hope that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord.  
>for those who have no one to pray for them.

Our Stewardship Last Sunday: Cur. \$937; Ben. \$83. Our attendance last week: 68.

**JUST A REMINDER !**

**WORSHIP HAS BEEN CANCELLED UNTIL  
FURTHER NOTICE**

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PLEASE STAY TUNED  
TO OUR WEBSITE FOR  
WEEKLY BULLETINS  
AND  
UPDATES**