

Live as Children of Light

Ephesians 5:10-21

I have been realizing that there are many families outside of our church who are tangled with many problems that lead to generational poverty. I have had one or two phone calls a day from those who are in need of monetary assistance from our church. One Sunday after service, during the pot luck lunch, I got a phone call from a young lady who seemed desperately in need. She asked me if there was anything could do to help her.

After lunch, Sun and I we went home and try to find anything in our kitchen, refrigerator and pantry for the young lady's needs. We packed bread, meat, cheese, eggs, Spam, soap, toilet paper, a handful of quarters for the washing machine, etc., into two black trash bags and delivered it to her. When I visited her apartment, I found three children from two to seven years old. She looked to be in her late twenties, and was a single mom. I was so sad when I realized that she had three children, couldn't work, and had to live by depending on assistances.

There are at least two kinds of poverty—situational and generational poverty. Situational poverty causes a lack of resources due to a particular event such as, a death, chronic illness, divorce, etc. But generational poverty is different. Generational poverty is an issue that suggests that there are chronic problems in the fabric of our society that have not been solved. Generational poverty has its own culture, hidden rules, and belief systems. I concluded that this young lady was living a life of generational poverty.

Families living in cycles of generational poverty family have no hope for children. Children cannot choose their parents. It is common that children brought up in such families also become poor and continue the cycle. I saw darkness in this young, single mother's life—no hope, no excitement, and no direction for the future.

I thought about the poverty issues in the context of church ministry. There are many low- income families living nearby the church. I thought, "If this church could open a child care center for the children in this neighborhood so that their parents can work hard while the church can care for their children safely, and with love, could this help to end the cycles of their generational poverty?" I'm praying for this matter.

Today's scripture reading deals with the children of darkness and the children of light. The issue of the children of the darkness is deeper than the issue of generational poverty. Darkness in life is a spiritual poverty. This scripture reading employs the metaphors of light and darkness to paint a contrast between paganism and Christianity; life without faith and life in faith.

The Apostle Paul exhorts the church in Ephesus, a new Christian community: "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light." Light and darkness are contrasted to show the difference between believers and non-believers in general. More specifically, "darkness" refers to sinners in the Bible. Light, in contrast, symbolizes new life in Christ and children of God. Possessing light or being in the light also suggests God's full grace for holy living. Jesus spoke of having "the whole body full of light" and "having no part in darkness" (Luke 11:34-36). Today's sermon topic is how to live as children of light in this world. I would like speak about three aspects of this concept.

Recently, Sun and I have taken a walk for an hour, almost every day. Sometimes, I would have rather had more rest and relaxation, but I was pushed by Sun to wake up and walk. So, we have been waking up at six a.m., getting dressed, and going out for a walk. Walking is the best habit for keeping good health. Like this new habit for good health, there are three points for the basic acts for a new life.

First of all, to live as children of light, waking up from spiritual slumber is essential. It seems to me that even more than material problems, generational poverty in our society faces serious problems of the spirit: There is no hope or enthusiasm, no direction and no power to wake up from sleep in spiritual darkness.

President Obama is trying to change the health care system in the United States. Yes, we need change in the health care system in the United States. The health care system is far behind even a small country like Korea. In Korea, everybody has health insurance and everybody can go to the hospital and be provided with basic health care. Health insurance costs much less there than in the United States. Even without health insurance, in Korea the total out-of-pocket cost for a patient to undergo something like stomach cancer surgery and follow-up would be less than five thousand U.S. dollars—for world-class medical care.

I don't know whether President Obama can change the health care system or not. But, the bigger problem that he cannot handle is a spiritual problem in America. We are in deep sleep and dream of materialism, hedonism and individualism.

One day Jesus told this parable: A rich man had land which bore good crops. He began to think to himself, "I don't have a place to keep all my crops. What can I do? O K. I have an idea, 'Let's tear my barn down and build bigger ones and then store the grain and all my other goods, so that nobody can steal my goods. And take life easy, eat, drink and enjoy since I have enough goods and crops for a long life for me!'" But, God said to him, "You fool! This very night you will have to give up your life; then who will get all these things you have kept for yourself?" This is a parable showing us how limited, how stupid a life of pure individualism is.

The Apostle Paul exhorts us, "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."(Ephesians 5:14b)

When you visit my house, you will see on our walls a frame with Korean calligraphy, which reads (in translation),
“My heart is steadfast, O God,
my heart is steadfast;
I will sing and make music.
Awake, my soul!
Awake, harp and lyre!
I will awaken the dawn.” (Psalm 57:7-8)

The Apostle Paul advises us, “Be filled with the spirit.” (5:18). Behind this exhortation might have been the drunken and debauched ecstasies of the mystery religions which were induced by the use of intoxicating wine. The person who is empty in mind is dangerous because there is weakness to be attacked by the evil spirit. Wake up from the deep sleep of deadly and foolish dreams of this world!

Secondly, to live as children of light, we should put on new clothes in our mind. Clothing is representative of our selves. While clothing differs by custom and culture, it is a universal human culture that without clothing, we generally cannot appear to others. Sometimes, what to wear or how to wear it is a big issue for us when we go out—perhaps especially for the ladies in our households.

A minister in San Diego was called into the sanctuary early one morning. The custodian wanted him to see a strange offering that had been left on the altar. There were a pair of brown corduroy pants, a belt, a white T-shirt, a pair of tan suede boots, and a note. There were bloodstains on the shirt and on the note. The note said: “Please listen to God.” It was signed, and there was a phone number.

The minister dialed the number. A nineteen-year-old young man answered and told his story. He had run away from home and had been wandering in a wasteland of drugs, drifting from one place to another, getting into all kinds of trouble and involved in all kinds of sordid behavior. The night before, he had hit bottom. There had been a struggle on the streets, a fight, and an almost fatal beating. After he realized that he was beaten and had blacked-out, this young man came to the church, found an unlocked door, and went into the sanctuary.

He stayed there all night, crying, praying, and pondering. He asked God to forgive him and show him the way to go. All at once the presence of God became very real. He knew God was there. He felt God’s forgiveness. A wonderful peace came. He committed himself to follow Christ. He determined to make right the things he had messed up. He felt fresh and clean, like a new man. To symbolize his new life and new commitment, he had put on some new clothes he had with him in his bedroll and had left the others as a kind of offering, giving God his old life. He walked out the door a new person with a new vision, a new hope, a new life, a new direction.

The putting on of new clothes, a new vision, a new hope and a new direction is mandated for living as children of light. Paul speaks of “goodness, righteousness, and truth” as new garments in which to adorn ourselves, like putting on new clothes (Ephesians 5:9).

Lastly, to live as children of light, walking with God is the first step for new life. Paul says, “For once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light” (5:8) And again, he reminds us, “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise.” (5:15) Walking is practical and realistic for moving forward. Don’t talk a talk, walk your walk!

We sometimes talk too much, sitting on a rocking chair, moving back and forth. Even if we seem to be moving, back and forth, sitting on the rocking chair, there is no step forward. We need action. Be prepared to act when you hear the gospel, God’s command to us. To walk, we need to point our direction forward.

All of us have seen hitchhikers who stand along the highway holding up signs to indicate where they would like to go, signs that reveal their hoped-for destination. Some are very specific – Dallas, Seattle, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles. Others are less exact – Florida, Michigan, Montana, Texas. Still others are even more general – North, East, South, West. One Christmas season not long ago, a driver saw a young man hitchhiking in Southern California, standing by the highway and holding up a sign that read ANYWHERE.

One time we had two dogs, Border Collies, dogs bred for sheep herding in my house. They were very active, out-going dogs. We loved them so much. They loved to go for a walk, and not only to walk but to run. If you just took a step toward the door, or act as if you are going to pick up their leash, they would get into the most inspiring routine. Their ears perk up. Their eyes light up. Their tails wag. They run, they jump and they celebrate.

When I took them out door they pull my leash hands and became so excited and over joy and enthusiasm. When I see their amazing joy, excitement, anticipation, and enthusiasm, I’d sometimes find myself thinking that every church member should love something as much as these dogs love their walk.

Apostle Paul once said, “There will be terrible times in last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lover of money, boastful, proud - having a form of godliness but denying its power.” Exercise your faith, love, hope and power which the risen Lord gave us.

When the early Christian church had power of Holy Spirit the disciples went out and testified the power of Holy Spirit. They transformed a crippled beggar to a walker who went to the sanctuary to praise to God. Wake up from the dead of sleep and put on new clothes of new hope and let’s walk a new direction with God. Let’s be a walking church raised from the crippled.