

4 Lent – Year A – April 6, 2011 - Homily
1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41
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We have a wonderful reading tonight from Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, which still applies today. I say wonderful, because the reading is about living our faith, or as we like to say here, about our faith in action. It gives me a great opportunity to brag on you all and all the great ministries at Our Saviour. This teaching on right or ethical behavior comes in response to Paul's theological reflection from verses 1 and 2 of this chapter of his letter to the Ephesians. They read, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us..."

There are two points we want to note here, so that we can avoid the common pitfall of getting bogged down in trying to define what is right. The first is that we are beloved children of God. It is in that identity that we are living and growing in our lifetime journey of transformation. That identity is given to us when we are baptized into Christ's body, and clothed in His righteousness. We don't have to guess or tie ourselves in knots to understand what is right. But we do have to pray, listen, study Scripture and worship in community in order to grow in Christ. The communal aspect of Bible study and sharing is vital here. I'm so proud of our weekly Bible studies, and of our annual Advent and Lenten programs, as well as our willingness to listen to God's Word together. Those who already participate know how richly we're all blessed when we share our different perspectives and understanding of God's Word. The Word of God is living and active, not stuck on a page in a book! It lives and breathes in our hearts and minds, and especially in our living faith. Bible study is a lively conversation that allows us to learn from one another. It draws from the broader Christian tradition and interpretations from great theologians across the ages. Yet the most important part of Bible study is how we hear the word together, share our responses and experiences, and how we live our faith right here amongst our own family, friends and neighbors.

The second point is that we are to be imitators of God. For us that means being imitators of Christ, which in turn means to be His disciple; learning at the Master's feet, studying His ways, and listening to the Holy Spirit whom Jesus sent to guide us into all truth. Again, our identity in Him is what drives us to become disciples, to thirst for a closer relationship with our Lord and Savior. So what practices does Jesus' life model for us? There are many aspects to Jesus' life and ministry, but high on the list of Jesus' practices are feeding and serving the hungry, and sticking up for outcasts and those who have no voice in the community. As well as healing the sick, teaching and preaching, without ever compromising God's boundless love and compassion, mercy or justice. Serving the hungry is something we do in so many ways here at Our Saviour. Each month we give food to the Love Kitchen. We also endeavor to raise money for many different organizations around the country and the world to help those who have nothing, or who are truly destitute and hungry. But we also serve the spiritually hungry. Our children and families who need to feel comfortable in church are fed in lively, creative ways so that they can see, feel and experience the Gospel message through our Children's and Family Chapel and our Vacation Bible School. Our adults are fed through our Bible and book studies, through our awesome library, with our informative Health Ministry seminars, and through articles in our monthly newsletter. We are also filled constantly by God's grace in the Body and Blood of Christ when we worship together. Our Lay Eucharistic Visitors share this blessing with those who cannot come to church. We are now blessed to have several preachers who open the word for us, and teach us through their own lives.

Incidentally, we are all teaching and sharing the Gospel all the time in daily life.

Tonight, is our weekly healing service. We also have a group of dedicated parishioners who pray daily for all those on our prayer list, for all members of this parish, and for anyone who needs immediate prayer. Prayer is so embedded in our daily and weekly rhythm of life in Christ, we sometimes forget how powerful our prayers are, especially when we lift others up to God, and pray that God's will be done. Jesus also constantly offered Himself as a servant to others. I need to brag some more, because we have so many members here who follow Jesus' example as servant leaders of this community and in the broader community, as care givers, as those who keep in touch by phone or with notes and letters. As well as those who serve us as leaders in worship and singing. Truly this community knows how to practice God's graciousness. The fruit we bear is God's fruit, the fruit worthy of children of light.

The difference between walking in darkness and being children of light is huge. This is much deeper than some kind of metaphorical descriptor. Walking in darkness is embracing or living an identity that reflects hopelessness, death, and despair. It is one whose heart is hardened against God, and one who turns away from God. Sadly, that is a way of being for many in the world today. On the other hand, being a child of light is one who desires and pursues a relationship with God in Christ Jesus. It is a way of life, a way of being in the world as a living lamp of God's love and grace in word and deed. It is living our faith in Christ, and revealing the face of Christ to others.

Our identity as Christ's own in the world is shaped and formed in and through our worship of God. Former Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, has these wise words for us. "The fundamental business of life is always worship.... People are always thinking that conduct is supremely important... [It is truer to say] that worship is of supreme importance and conduct tests it. Conduct tests how much of ourselves was in the worship we gave to God. We get the most from our religion when we stop thinking about our needs, and think about God. Gaze and gaze on Him." Temple tells us that such worship leaves us full of kindness for others, and compels us to serve God by loving and serving our neighbors as ourselves. In other words, our worship together forms us, and transforms us, so that we begin to see the world more and more through the eyes of Christ. That is with much greater love and compassion than we could ever find within ourselves naturally, without Christ. Martin Luther would say that it is the power of God's grace in the sacraments that empowers us to do the work God has given us to do. Or as Paul says, in Philippians 4:13, "[We] can do all things through him who strengthens [us]." Our worship and our faith are always reflected in our conduct; in how we live as children of light.

Amen.