

CALL TO WORSHIP Ephesians 5:8-12

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.

It takes courage to step out from the darkness.

For good light exposure, you have to step into the light.

The WORD

John 9:1-7 NRSV

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.

LIVING THE WORD

Knock, Knock, (whose there) God. (God who?) Well, I can tell we pastors, still have lots of work to do!

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

Happy Easter, it is still Easter for 43 more days, until Pentecost.

My Uncle John, my dad's youngest brother, is only 8 years older than I am. He lived in the house next door with my grandparents. Though some of the things he taught us weren't always to our parents liking or approval, he did take time to teach me and my Brother Dan how to play chess. We would spend hours learning and then trying to beat him in this strategic game.

How many of you play chess? For those that do, you can correct me later if I get any of this incorrect, as I haven't played this board game for years. For those of you who don't we are going to process the game as it might apply to our lives, and you might be intrigued enough to ask someone who plays, to teach you the rest...

Using a checker board there are an equal number of chess pieces for both sides. One side's pieces are light in color, for thought purposes that will be our side; and one side has dark pieces, this morning we will call that the dark side. The point of the game is to move your pieces across the board taking the opposing pieces if you can or need to, until your King reaches the far side of the board.

The king is the most important piece on the board. The entire game revolves around the king. The King is also vulnerable and needs to be defended from all of the opponent's pieces. The king can only move one square, in any direction on a turn, but, to win - that is the one piece that has to reach the goal...the other side of the board.

In our society today, God could be the King: vulnerable to the dislike, disgrace and disinterest of many in our world. Our goal may be to honor God enough so all may reach the ultimate goal of knowing our Creator and living into God's plan as it is meant, for each of us according to who we each were created to be.

So we will be the important pieces that stand by the King. Let me describe them to you:

- The **rook** can move any number of squares straight ahead or to the sides.
- The **bishop** can move any number of squares diagonally.
- The **queen** combines the power of the rook and bishop and can move any number of squares in any direction.
- The **knight** moves in the form of an "L"-shape two squares long and one square wide.

If you aren't a Chess player, about now you are thinking: "This is a very complicated game..." Indeed it is, and so are our lives.

The people around us make their moves – their life choices according to their capabilities. We have all been given gifts to move in different directions in our lives.

It is up to us in which directions we will go. We can work together and move ever forward, or we can try to advance on our own, moving ahead of the rest, at the risk of entering the dark side alone.

There are those of us that are like the rook, who see their path straight ahead and clear. Some of them step on whatever gets in their way; others of them clear the path for others to follow. There are those who make their path always to their sides, helping others advance with them.

Like the bishop, some people can move in diagonal directions to get things accomplished. They can see outside the box – they see and move at angles. We need them to lead us on paths we might not see otherwise.

You know those people who go off totally in their own direction? Sometimes more this way than that? They are the knights; willing to search for the best way to protect the King, while staying not too far from the rest.

Then there is the queen, those people who seem to have gotten all of the gifts. They can make moves in life in almost any direction. They adapt quickly to whatever surroundings they are put into and guide others toward a good way to go, in order to move forward. They are often the leaders.

We are they: The rooks and the bishops and the knights and the queens, defending the King with honor and praise; all with appointed callings to help the King to Victory, according to the gifts we have been given in the creation of our individual and unique selves.

We need not spend time worrying about our lack of gifts, or our desires to be something else, but to identify and use the gifts we have been given to move the King forward.

We need to help each other, to make sure all sides are protected as we move together through the dark side of the game board.

When we find our place in the game, or on the journey across the board, we can see and understand God's will and plan as it unfolds before us. The Apostle Paul said: "everything exposed by the light becomes visible..."

And so we move forward, each in our own way, on this journey of life. When we can join our forces and move forward we are much more effective than when we try to go it alone. The goal: to get through the dark side and win the victory.

There are opposing forces of darkness in our lives that sometimes overtake us. Paul says "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness." Yet in Chess, when we are caught, we have to sit out of the game for a while, no matter which and how many gifts God has given us.

Sometimes we wallow in the darkness of life, finding in it a short term satisfaction for what we think we are missing in life. While in the darkness we meet the forces of darkness that can drag us even deeper, making us feel as if we are at places of 'no return.' Jesus says "We must work the works of God who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work."

In the game of chess there are eight pawns.

- The **pawn** may move forward to the unoccupied square immediately in front of it; or on its first move it may advance two squares; or it may move to a square occupied by an opponent's piece which is diagonally in front of it, capturing that piece.

They are a smaller piece than the rest of the pieces and usually considered a 'lesser' piece in the game. They go out first. They take the first hits and losses for the rest. They are the front line of defense. Like Christ they cover the board, going out before us and staying with us as we go...

The **pawn** also has some special moves, one of which is called the pawn promotion. When a pawn advances all the way through, reaching the other side of the board it is *promoted* and can be exchanged for the player's choice of queen, rook, bishop, or knight .

You see Jesus is the pawn, the ultimate sacrifice; not to save the King, but to save us. The pawn makes himself the least for us and then says: "As long as I am in the World, I am the light of the world." Jesus can bring us out of even our deepest darkness, back into the game, and on the journey.

This may be the most difficult part for us. Moving out of play isn't as uncomfortable as moving back into play. This is us exposed, us visible, and when we step back into the light everyone will know where we have been and what we have done while in the darkness.

God already knows, and sees, and yearns for us to get back into the game. As for others, trust me, they have all been taken off the board and out of the game, at some time or other. They also have had their 'time out' in life as well.

We don't like to talk about those dark times in our lives, because, they are dark, but we all have them. We all have sinned and fallen short. So no one has the right to judge without the grace of Christ to forgive and forget.

It is a difficult thing to see ourselves exposed – even to ourselves. To face up to the fact we are stuck in darkness. Can we see Jesus when we look in the mirror of our lives? Do we reflect Christ's light? The next hymn we will sing, after the sermon is: 'Open my eyes that I may see, glimpses of truth you have for me. Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit Divine!'

We have to want to see where we are living in the dark sides of life before we can do anything to be forgiven. Then we have to want to move into the light, exposing ourselves in order to receive it. This movement comes with all of its recriminations, long enough to feel the pain of what we've done. We have to own the darkness in order to leave it behind us.

Then we can at least see a glimmer of Christ's light as a glimmer of hope. Then can we reach for the hand of Christ as he sacrifices himself as a pawn for us, allowing us to get back in the game and go on?

If we are willing to get back in the game, turning our life around and not looking back, Jesus gets us back on the board to once again move in the directions we have been given to move.

When you play chess, and one of the pieces is redeemed by a pawn, it seems like that piece, coming in from behind the dark pieces that are left, advances now back into play with a new vigor.

How many times have you heard the stories of those who have a new outlook on life after they have reentered life from some dark places.

Life is a journey, not a game, but we make moves in life when our turns come. We go in the directions we have been given to move. It works best when we take those turns in good order with the others around us.

Our journey, our game, changes with each move we make and hopefully we learn as we go on. Practice makes perfect, and if we are moving on to perfection we have to stay actively participating in the game.

God already has won the Final Victory. That is what Easter is all about. There were people in Jesus life who were from the darkness. Some were able to see God through him and find their way through the darkness to the light. Some did not.

A Sunday School Teacher asked her class about the meaning of Easter. A little boy raised his hand and said: "That's when we shoot off firecrackers and celebrate our freedoms." A little girl piped up and said, "no, that is when we eat turkey and give thanks." "I know!" a third youngster exclaimed. "That's when Jesus comes out of the tomb – but if he sees his shadow, we get more winter".

This Sunday, the first Sunday after Easter is celebrated in many congregations as Holy Humor Sunday; that is because the joke is on the devil, Jesus is still alive!

Christ continues to sacrifice for each of our wrong moves. Just before his death on the cross he celebrated Holy Communion. He did this so that we can remember that Jesus is still the light for us. In that meal we can know Christ's presence in our lives, reaching beyond himself to find us in our darkness and pull us out, back into the light with him.

When you pray, if you take time to listen you may hear Jesus saying to you, 'I am here for you, come into the light.'

We can depend on Christ. Can we live like Christ for others?

Do we know we can get through the dark side to be safely exposed to the light? And how are we doing at defending and honoring God until the final, final Victory is announced by Christ's return?

Christ Will come again! That isn't a threat to you or me, but a promise of belonging to the side that already has won, through Christ's death and resurrection.

For when Christ does come again, the final, final Victory, then we will really have a party.

PRAY

#454 'Open my eyes that I may see, glimpses of truth you have for me. Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit Divine!'