

*8 For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light! 9 For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true. Ephesians 5:8-9 NLT*

**Good morning, Harbor...** What a few weeks we've had. Wow... I sat down to begin writing this message the day after the election, and it was hard to wrap my mind around the hatred, the bullying, and flaunting, and arguing that was filling my News Feed.

It had very little to do with the fact that Trump was elected, and much more to do with **revealing** what was truly within everyone's hearts. **A revelation of what we had been keeping hidden.** People on the winning side, boasting of their victory. People on the losing side, just reeling from it all, blaming people and being consumed with fear and name calling.

**Our country has been sent through the ringer.** And... what better time than to have this morning's discussion, which is titled, *"Living as Light-Filled People."*

We've been in this series in the book of **Ephesians** where we've begun unraveling some of the great mysteries of our faith. We looked at the Trinity, we looked at being raised from death to life, last week we heard from Emma about each of our gifts in the Church, and today, we're in chapter 4 & 5, learning what it means to live as people **FILLED** with light. We've been defining mystery not as something that cannot be understood, but rather something that can be endlessly understood. So we're investigating these mysteries of the Christian faith.

**I've been working here at this church for the past 8 years,** believe it or not. Started leading worship here one summer, then came on as an intern, then hired full-time when I graduated college. Like many of you, I wasn't raised in the Church... My family went when I was very little, but when 3 kids and 3 different soccer practices popped up, my parents decided to stop attending. *(Which I'm honestly not upset about. Sometimes I think **the only reason** I was interested in Christianity as a teenager was because my parents WEREN'T into it. It sounded cool because of that.)*

So my moral compass was established primarily by my parents, who did a relatively good job. Their whole approach to parenting was to "prepare us for the real world," so I got a lot of lessons around work-ethic and dealing with tough situations. It served me well.

**But it didn't keep me out of trouble.** If only Question 4 had passed 15 years ago! When I was a junior in high school, I was arrested for possession of marijuana, had 6 months of probation, and it sort of woke me up. At least to the darkness of drugs and drug-addiction. **I didn't want to live with a dependence on any substance like that.**

**But it didn't keep me away from other stupid things,** like silly high-school relationships. The darkness of **D**rugs was quickly replaced with the darkness of **D**ating; and unhealthy relationships. I was in-love with being in-love. **Such a hopeless romantic.** And so I had a bunch of different girlfriends, and I found my identity in who I was dating. **And as a result, I did a lot of damage...** To myself (emotionally, on a soul-level) and to the girls that I dated.

**So I met my wife in college, and after a few months of puppy love, we got serious about faith, and getting our relationship in the right place with God.** We got married when I graduated, and I started working at this church.

I had no seminary training, no apprenticeship from Christian leaders, no experience growing up in a Christian home... I was in uncharted waters.

So I learned on the job. I watched the people around me, and how they reacted to certain situations, and learned, in turn, how **I** should respond to those types of scenarios. I picked up on what to say, what I should believe, how I should act... **All to fit into this tribe.** And I did a pretty good job at it... Until I didn't.

I'll spare you the details, but over these past 6 months, I've recognized **so much un-health** in my life. And it hasn't been so much a result of overt DARKNESS in my life; but more so **trying to keep my fire burning with no wood left in the stove.**

Trying to force a **fire**, when my soul was truly just **tired**...

I wonder how many of you can identify with that. You're living a certain way, and it's good. **And the people around you recognize how good your life is.** People might even start to comment about it. That *"You always have your life together,"* or *"You're always so happy,"* or envious of how successful you are at **work**; or envious of your **faith** and **wisdom** and *"You always know what to say..."*

You might've had some sort of spiritual breakthrough, and risen to a new elevation, working your way up the mountain... **But...** what you failed to do was **set-up BASECAMP at that new elevation.** You climbed up the mountain, but failed to bring what you needed to sustain living there. And now, you're faking it... while your soul is actually deprived of oxygen, and you're pretending that you've still got it all together: You're **still** happy, **still** successful, **still** wise and **full** of faith... Except you're not. **That's where I was.**

**Since the 1920s, there have been over 280 deaths while trying to climb Mount Everest.** 280 men and women, mountaineers and Sherpas... Died while trying to climb a mountain.

Now, a lot of these tragedies were unexpected, a majority were due to unpredictable weather or avalanche... Things that were out of the control of the climbers. **But** some happened simply because of bad decisions people made, against their wise counsel of Sherpas and other mountaineers.

Here's the thing about altitude: **Our bodies don't adjust well.** We are fragile, fragile beings. We need specific oxygen concentration in the air, we need specific temperature and calorie intake... or else we're done for.

**Altitude Sickness** is caused by ascending too quickly, and not allowing your body to acclimate properly. When it's mild, it's sort of like a **bad hangover** – headache, nausea, fatigue... But when it's bad, it's bad.

Altitude Sickness called **HAPE** is excess fluid on the lungs and causes breathlessness. In mountaineer training, the manual literally says, *“It is never normal to feel breathless when you are resting — even on the summit of Everest. This should be taken as a sign that you have HAPE and may die soon.”* **They don’t mess around.**

The second deadly type of Altitude Sickness is called **HACE**, which is fluid on the brain — this causes confusion, clumsiness and loss of motor skills. Signs can be uncharacteristic behavior like laziness when you’re typically a “go-getter” (like someone that would be climbing Everest), or excessive emotion or violence.

A few years back, I was watching a special on Everest, and it showed actual footage of a man, in the Death Zone, who was completely disoriented, **and decided to take off his oxygen mask**, to help himself breathe better. Which of course, was completely INSANE. The Sherpa begged and pleaded and finally convinced him to put it back on, and to follow him back down to safety... Even though he was 20 minutes from the highest peak on earth, from fulfilling the dream he had spent years preparing for, because of his Altitude Sickness, he had to turn back. **And thank God he did, because he survived.**

Why all of this Everest talk?

Because I believe, to begin this conversation of being representatives of Christ in the world, we need to stop pretending. We need to make an honest assessment of where we’re at. Some of us, myself included, with our oxygen deprived brains, we **believe** we’re making good decisions, when we’re actually just taking our masks off in the Death Zone.

In our striving, and our attempts to maintain an image, of **success** or **beauty** or **intelligence**, or **of BEING DISCIPLES OF JESUS**, we’re not paying attention to our souls, and we’re putting ourselves in danger.

**If you’re honest with yourself; are you ignoring some of these symptoms?** Are you pretending to be someone or something you’re not, and trying to muscle through...

“Fake it ’til you make it” doesn’t apply to Everest, and it doesn’t apply to spirituality.

To begin a conversation around **bringing the Light of Jesus into the world**, we have to be honest with ourselves about where we’re at. As Emma shared last week; there’s nothing wrong with being early in your development as a follower of Christ. And God honors **honesty** around your lack of experience or naivety, much more than pretending to have everything figured out. The former attitude places you in the position of a pupil, ready to learn and grow; the latter assumes an arrogance and being “above” necessary spiritual growth. One promotes growth; the other stunts it.

So... Since we’re talking about “light” today, let’s **Imagine you’re an oil lamp.** And your job is to share light. Not to necessarily CREATE the light, but to harness it and be a tool for those around you.

**So someone gives you a light.** They light your wick, and you're burning. And it's working! *And you're being a good Christian!* You're saying **the right things**, you're acting **generous**, you're **drinking less**, you **stopped swearing** (most of the time), you're **servicing** at Church, and not only that but serving *in the toddler room*, (like **MAJOR** extra-credit points)... Life is good. You look good. You might even feel good. But here's the thing you forgot to check.

### **You have no oil.**

Will an oil lamp catch flame with no oil? **Absolutely.** The wick will light and it'll **ACT** like it's working. Everyone around it will say, "*Wow! Look at that lamp! It's doing its' job great.*" But soon, you realize...

### **When the oil is absent...**

**It's only a matter of time before the wick burns out.**

It's only a matter of time.

However, (*Yes, I researched this.*) when you've got an unlimited supply of oil, a standard, 8" wick can last you **9000** hours of burn time... **That's 375 days, over a year, of continual light, being shown and shared and illuminating dark places.**

How's your oil supply?

For the past two years, I've fluctuated back and forth between having abundant oil (with rest, reflection, hearing from God) and trying to keep a dry wick burning (striving, pretending, running on empty). **One is a joy; the other a nightmare.**

**Here are 7 of Jesus' words that change everything:**

*"I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life."* **JOHN 8:12 NLT**

**The entire conversation shifts when we realize that it's not OUR responsibility to create the fire (or even to keep it burning).**

**Our text for today, Ephesians 5** says this:

*8 For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light! 9 For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true.* **Ephesians 5:8-9 NLT**

Notice that Paul is very clear that **the light isn't something we generate from within.** "*but now you have light from the Lord...*" This is why we get sucked into pretending. This is why we find ourselves on the side of Everest completely disoriented. This is why we try to be a "lamp on a stand" with no oil in the tank.

**Living as a Child of Light doesn't require rubbing sticks together.**

Rather than the weight resting on us; to **produce** a spark and fanning it into flame, it is much more about **beholding** and **reflecting** light that already exists... Light coming from the Lord. Jesus is the light of the world.

Here's something I really want you guys to hear this morning: We cannot **REFLECT** what we haven't **RECEIVED**.

Have you **experienced** Jesus as the light of the world? Have you allowed yourself to receive that yet? The blessing and love; completely undeserved, shining on you; proud of you, even though you're an absolute mess... This love from the Father, filling you with lightness and joy. We cannot **REFLECT** something that we haven't yet **RECEIVED**.

Jesus' hope for us is to be like a city on a hill:

*"You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father..." MATTHEW 5:14-16 NLT*

If we are to be Light-filled people, being a lamp on a stand, bringing light to everyone in the house... We must first **RECEIVE** that light.

**How many of you got to see the SuperMoon this past Sunday?** We carried our kids out around 8 o'clock and it was amazing. You could see every little detail, every crater... Amazing. And then everyone started sharing pictures of it on Facebook & Instagram. People are like... "Look at this amazing moon!" Here's my picture: **This is a Public Service Announcement:** iPhones were not created to capture the detail of the moon's surface. Stop trying.

**Here's a PROFESSIONAL picture of the moon.** Taken in 2014 by a Chinese rover. It's remarkably... PLAIN, isn't it? **Looks like a construction site. Looks like 80% of Nevada.**

**Because the moon is a desert of darkness.** There's not one thing on the moon that produces light. If you were on the dark side of the moon (*what's up Pink Floyd*), you would be in utter darkness.

Then why, last Sunday, could we take a walk by moonlight? Why was the moon literally casting shadows in the middle of the night?

**Because of the sun.**

**The moon, apart from the sun, is a gray, crater-filled wasteland.** But with the reflection of the sun? It becomes an object of incredible beauty; a symbol of **serenity** and **rest**; A reason to keep our kids up late and stand in awe of this wonder; a light for those walking in darkness...

I wonder if we could learn a thing or two from the moon...

In **John 12**, Jesus says...

*46 I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the dark. John 12:46 NLT*

*...Those who walk in the darkness cannot see where they are going. 36 Put your trust in the light while there is still time; then you will become children of the light.” John 12:35b-36 NLT*

We know, from tradition, from the Bible, from Jesus’ words, from our own life experiences... **That Jesus is the light of the world.** A voice of clarity, truth, and transparency. He walked amongst the **sinners, heathens, prostitutes, drunks...** And instead of climbing on His high-horse to look down on them, He simply shone light into their darkness.

And **illuminated the gray, crater-filled wasteland within them**, to show them how beautiful (and useful) they actually are. If the Moon spent its’ entire life judging itself on its ability to PRODUCE light; it would spend its’ whole life thinking it’s a failure. That’s not its’ job. Its’ job is to REFLECT the light. The same is true of us.

Here’s another thing the moon teaches us: **We don’t have to be shiny to reflect the light of God, we just have to be in the right position.**

We don’t have to be shiny; we just have to be in the right position. Let’s be honest, the surface of the moon is an ugly, ugly place. No color. No plants. No running rivers. Nothing shiny or metallic. No smooth surfaces. Just covered in dusty hills and craters.

But positioned in the right place? It becomes so beautiful that it becomes an object of worship. The Greek goddess “Selene”; the Inuit’s god “Igaluk”; the Aztec’s goddess “Coyolxauhqui”; the Arabian god “Ta’lab”; the Chinese goddess “Han Ying”; the Hindu goddess “Raka”; the Egyptian god “Iah”... All worshipping the moon. (Now we could launch into a dozen reasons why worshipping the MOON itself falls a bit short; but the point here is the **BEAUTY**; the **ATTRACTION**; and the **GLORY** of a well-positioned ball of dust...) It’s amazing.

**Are we positioning ourselves with similar strategy?** Are we floating through life unaware of our potential? Or are we looking at the people around us and strategically placing ourselves in a way to reflect God’s love to them? Like a well-placed mirror, able to shine light around sharp corners... **Are we even aware of the good that we can bring into the world?**

So if you take anything home from Church this week; it’s this: **Moon the world.** Moon your neighbors. Moon your boss. Moon your kids. God wants us out there, mooning everyone... OK?

I think a lot of us grew up with a “Karmic” view of God. *“If I do good things, I’ll get good things. If I do bad things, I’ll get bad things.”* Our idea of faith in God was **checks and balances**; our life either worthy of a REWARD or worthy of a PUNISHMENT.

But I’d propose that Christian spirituality isn’t as much about reward and punishment as it is **light** and **darkness**. We don’t act a certain way so that we are rewarded for our good deeds, we live in a certain way so that we can be light, versus being darkness in the world.

In almost every interaction, of every single day, we are either being LIGHT in that person's life, or we are being DARKNESS. We are either **illuminating; reflecting**, or we are **absorbing; consuming**.

*(And don't get me wrong, we NEED times when people are pouring into us; shining their light into our dark situations. When we allow others to minister to us... **But that's not what I'm talking about here.**)*

**Do you ever have a conversation with someone where you literally feel like the life is being sucked out of you?** (You're like, "Yeah, that person is sitting next to me right now.") We all have those people in our lives. We **know** that every time we talk to them, we're just preparing to have our little fires snuffed out.

**That's because some people are black-holes.** No light can survive their gravitational vacuum. Everywhere they go, they bring with them an appetite for darkness.

Here's today's advice: **Don't be a black-hole.**

(And, by the way, there's your newest G-rated curse word! You can just say, "Man, stop being such a black-hole. You're such a black-hole." They'll have no idea what you're talking about, but it'll make them think.) Just like when you're tempted to engage in some road rage, where some other folks might give someone the middle finger? Instead of that, just give them a **thumbs down**. It's hurts much more... It like taps into their childhood. They won't know what to do.

Other this past year, surrounded by such a brutal political battle, **it's easy for us to point out darkness**. If I gave you each a piece of paper and asked you to write down examples of darkness in our world, we'd have hundreds in a few minutes. It's all around us. But what is it actually?

**What is darkness?** Because I believe if we begin to understand what darkness actually is, we can understand how to defeat it.

**dark•ness** 'därknəs/ noun: the total absence of light.

Contrary to popular belief, Darkness is not a force. It is an absence. And although absence can be strong, and painful, and damaging... It is not very intimidating. It's not active and powerful, it's simply a void; an emptiness.

**John 1...**

*1 In the beginning the Word already existed.*

*The Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.*

*2 He existed in the beginning with God.*

*3 God created everything through him,  
and nothing was created except through him.*

*4 The Word gave life to everything that was created,  
and his life brought light to everyone.*

*5 The light shines in the darkness,*

*and the darkness can never extinguish it.*  
**John 1:1-5 NLT**

**Darkness can never extinguish light.** Darkness is powerless over light.

Consider the darkness around us:

- the injustice
- the racism
- the poor becoming poorer while the rich become richer
- the 783 million people around the world without access to clean drinking water
- the sex-trafficking
- the child labor
- the brokenness **within us** and around us; relationally, emotionally, spiritually...

While it often seems insurmountable, and active and strong... We need to remember it isn't a **presence**, it is an **absence**. And absence can be overcome by... **presence**.

How do we fight the darkness of sex-trafficking? **We show up.** We bring light to the darkness. We bring something that was previously lacking... **The light and love of God.**

We become a prism that God shines into, and we refract that light and love to these dark corners of the world.

**Some might view it as a burden, but I view it as a privilege.** What an honor that God would use us to liberate, to educate, to illuminate people and lives that have been living in darkness... Such a gift. And so amazing to witness people walking **OUT** of darkness.

Here's something we need to understand about people that have been living in darkness, that I learned from my personal experience IN THE DARKNESS... **We have to be patient and gentle with them.** Why?

Because they've been in the darkness for so long that their eyes have adjusted... and if we come rushing in with this blazing light; **they'll run for their lives.** You know how brutal it is when your eyes have adjusted to the dark and then a flashlight or car headlight shines on you. You shield your eyes and look away.

But... if a gentle, mature, responsible light is introduced... Slowly at first, and then becoming slightly brighter and brighter, over time... Allowing their eyes to adjust, we can bring light to people in the darkness, while not scaring them off.

**Being light-filled people is an incredible privilege,** and may we grasp the weight of that responsibility.



The other day, my friend came out of work to his car and found a 8.5x11” sheet under his windshield wiper with **10 different reasons he should become a Christian**. No conversation, no grace.

**Is that light?** Sure. But is it drawing people in? Or is it scaring them further into the darkness?

**Harbor, may we be responsible bearers of God’s light.**

To close, I want to recap some of what we talked about this morning:

- It’s foolish to try to force a fire when our souls are truly just tired... We need to be honest with ourselves (and the people around us) about the state of our souls. “*Fake it ’til you make it*” doesn’t apply to Everest, and it doesn’t apply to faith.
- Remember that we can’t **REFLECT** something that we haven’t **RECEIVED**. Like those little glow-in-the-dark toys that need exposure to light before they glow at night, we must soak ourselves in the presence of Jesus, to in-turn reflect His light into the world. And we don’t have to be shiny to reflect the light of God, we just have to be in the right position.
- And with all of this, we do it with tact, and kindness, and patience. **Because God has been patient with us**. Running into complete darkness with a 5000 lumen floodlight isn’t Christ-like; it’s cruel. Be patient. Be responsible. Draw people in, rather than trying to race and expose and crusade.

Harbor, may our lives reflect the **glory** and **goodness** of the Lord.

May our lives be filled with light, and anointed with everlasting oil.

May we receive the light of Jesus, and allow Him to illuminate the dark corners of our souls.

And in response, may we be humble torches in the darkness around us, drawing people into the beauty of Jesus, and walking alongside them into the light.

**Let’s pray...**