

At the end of our lesson from his letter to the church in Ephesus this morning, St. Paul wrote, **“Christ will shine on you.”** As we draw closer and closer to Easter, these words become even more exciting for us; we’re filled with an even greater sense of anticipation of our Lord’s Second Coming.

That’s why we’re here—it’s the promise, the promise of God’s presence, of Christ’s infilling, of the hope that fills our hearts as we receive as our own the light of Christ.

This morning we’re going to talk about this light and what it has to do with our walk with God and with one another.

## **OPENING PRAYER**

### **EPHESIANS 5:8-14**

**For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light <sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) <sup>10</sup> and find out what pleases the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. <sup>12</sup> It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. <sup>13</sup> But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. <sup>14</sup> This is why it is said: “Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”**

You know the fairy tale of the Frog Prince: There was once a toad who lived in the pond of a princess. The princess lost her golden ball in the pond, and the toad retrieved it for her, but with one condition, that she would kiss him. *Ewww!* How the young princess did not want to make that promise! But she was desperate for her ball, and so she did promise the toad a kiss.

So, as we know, the toad recovered the ball, and while it took some time for the princess to fulfill her part of the bargain, inevitably she did so, planting a kiss on the lips of the slimy green toad. And when she did, it turned out the toad was not really a toad at all but a handsome prince who awaited his deliverance from a witch’s curse with that kiss.

The story ends there with princess and prince living happily ever after. But haven't you ever wondered whether or not the Frog Prince ever had second thoughts? I do. I wonder if he didn't long for—at least once during a lonely night when the princess had a headache—the familiar, cozy, muddy waters of the pond. The bulrushes and lily pads belonged to him. He'd hop here and hop there, coming and going as he pleased, snapping up a fly with his long tongue and lapping up a drink of water. Once a toad, it's hard not to be a toad anymore.

But it was different from the perspective of the princess. She had no history with the prince's froggy-ness that she would ever be interested in returning to. So you can imagine her horror a few months into their relationship when he reverted to his previous state, with a deep, guttural “ribbit,” a thrust of his tongue and the catching of a fly midair. *GULP!* “Delicious!”

But the prince was NOT a toad anymore. Not at all. In fact, as a prince he was quite the opposite. And being a prince includes a lot of responsibility, including not acting like a toad. But the history was still there in his mind and heart. It was a part of his identity.

“Ribbit!” The tongue, the fly. *GULP!* “Delicious!” – You can imagine how this would've been a problem for the young couple!

St. Paul wrote, **“you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light” (v.8)**. The people who first read this letter were once toads, in their own way. In Ephesus, there was a goddess whose name was Artemis. She was the fertility goddess of the land. The men connected spiritually with Artemis through the temple prostitutes, which is a great racket if you can get into it early.

So the people heard the story about Jesus, and they became Christians. But when you become a Christian, you have been kissed by God, and you are no longer a toad. You are a prince of heaven, an heir of God's heavenly kingdom.

But the people, especially the men, remembered the pleasures of the old ways. They wanted to go back, if even for just a taste: “Ribbit!” The tongue, the fly. *GULP!* “Delicious!”

And that is why Paul had to remind them that they were **“light in the Lord,”** and that they should now **“Live as children of the light.”**

It's the same for you and me. We need to be reminded of our toady-ness, for we've still got some of it in our minds and hearts. That's the darkness, and until we stand side by side with the Lord, it lingers.

But that's just the beginning. Paul continued, writing, **"(...the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) <sup>10</sup> ...find out what pleases the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them"** (vv.9-11).

Light and darkness are powerful images. Paul set them against each other, and we get that. It's the old story of good versus evil, hero versus antagonist, good guy versus bad guy, and superman versus super villain.

Paul earlier explained that we contend against our own internal demons, but now he alerts us to the outside forces as well. He wrote **"It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret"** (v.12). In other words, use your imagination, and you're probably right!

But why bother? What's the point? We know what is wrong, what is contrary to God's will. We don't need details about the sins of the people and how they wrecked their own hearts. We don't need that.

Paul wanted us to cut to the chase and focus on that which can actually lift us up, on that which nourishes us, on that which brings forth life, and spirit, and a joy-filled experience in the Lord!

He wrote, **"everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. <sup>14</sup> This is why it is said: 'Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you'"** (vv.13-14).

The Frog Prince, in his DNA, was a prince. Nonetheless, he had played the part of a toad for a longtime, and so there was always the temptation to return to that identity.

Last week I attended a party for my brother, Tony. It was his 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of sobriety. He's been clean now for longer than he used crystal meth. But told me, "Richard, there's not a day that goes by that I don't crave a hit of crystal meth. That's how strong it is; that's how addictive it is."

Tony hasn't been a toad for 20 years, but the temptation, the craving remains. "How do you do it?" I asked him. "I stay busy," he said. "Service is everything."

**"Live as children of the light"**—that's what Tony does. I love his story because it's so dramatic. If you'd known Tony 20 years ago—Tony the drug dealer—you'd have said, "Toad!" But if you knew Tony today—Tony the husband, father, brother, son, and friend—you'd say, "Prince!"

Our story's may not be as dramatic as Tony's, but just as St. Paul said, we were once darkness too. But Christ has shone on us, and we have been raised from a living death to the resurrected life, a life which began at our baptism and continues without end into eternity. Nonetheless, we need to be reminded of our new identity every day, and we need to take action.

Paul wrote, **"expose the deeds of darkness"** and **"everything exposed by the light becomes visible."**

The details about what this means Paul leaves to our imaginations. But I think it's fair to say he's calling us to make a difference in the most dynamic and powerful way we can in the environment where the Lord has planted us.

Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount that **"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven"** (Matthew 5:14).

One commentator offered the warning that there's no half-way house between darkness and light, that there's no duality between equal powers of light and darkness, which is to say light always wins! And he asked the question, "How then is it possible that anyone could give up the light of the Kingdom of God for the old life among the dead?!"

"Ribbit!" The tongue, the fly. *GULP!* "Delicious!"

I don't think it's that hard to slip back into toady-ness. Maybe that commentator hadn't had a lot of real world experience.

But Jesus said, **“I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in the darkness but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).**

Brothers and sister, we are under pressure night and day from many different kinds of things—from the world, the devil, our work, our own flesh, our friends, and our families—they all make demands on our time, our attention, our energy, and our hearts.

There’s stress and duress; conflict and turmoil; frustration and consternation—there are a thousand things every day we face which would drag us back down into the darkness, into the muddy, slimy lily pond which is fit only for toads.

But you are not a toad! As we continue our march toward Easter, remember that: You are not a toad. Jesus has set out before us a path to follow, a path worthy for the princes and princesses of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Be encouraged. You are a prince. You are a princess. And nothing can take that away from you. Look to the Lord. Follow his light. And believe in his life, for it is your life, the only life worth living for.

This week, my friends, let us give thanks for how the Lord has already lifted us up out of the darkness and given us lives in his light.

This week let us look for ways to grow as lights in this world. Despite the darkness all around, your light is greater, and let us ask the Lord for an opportunity to use our light to make a difference.

And this week let us share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.