

Fourth Sunday in Lent, Epistle, Year A

RISE AND SHINE

Ephesians 5:8-14

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Analysis by Chris Repp

8For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— 9for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. 10Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. 11Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; 13but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Author’s Note: This pericope depends on what precedes it in this and the previous chapter, so I go there to flesh it out.

DIAGNOSIS: Darkness

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Unfruitful Works
This part of Ephesians seems to have been written for our times. Or maybe people in every age have felt this about this letter and their own time since it was written. We have to go back to the middle of the previous chapter to clarify what is meant here by the “unfruitful works” of darkness: “Bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice” (Ephesians 4:31). Ripped from today’s headlines, no? This is “Gentile” behavior, the behavior of those who do not know Christ, and who have not been known by him.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Exposed

We must show these works for what they are. They are works caused by the darkening of the mind and hardening of the heart, which alienate us from the life of God (4:18)—spiritual Alzheimer's and heart disease all rolled into one. Worse still, perhaps, is our idolatry, that is, our greed (5:5). Our whole way of life is built on idolatrous greed.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Death

Idolatry, replacing God with other gods, is the ultimate biblical sin. It brings the wrath of God and leaves us out of the kingdom of Christ (5:5-6). Placing our trust in our own wealth and power, we betray that our allegiance is to the darkness and it seals our deadly fate.

PROGNOSIS: Light

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Resurrection

"Now in the Lord you are light" (5:8). This opening verse of our pericope sends us back the beginning of the chapter (5:2): "Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." The only hope for us who are dead is this gospel of his death and resurrection for our sake.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Visible

"Sleeper awake! ... Christ shines on you!" Christ's illumination is what makes all the difference. The Word declares us to be light, and we are light by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. By the gift of faith we possess what is promised.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Fruit of the Light

And light, in this overarching mixed metaphor, bears good fruit. What does that look like? Kindness, tenderheartedness, forgiveness (4:32), living in love (5:1), wisdom, (5:15) and thanksgiving (5:20). Let that be our witness in these dark times, so that the light of Christ may shine through us onto all

who live in darkness and the shadow of death.