

Ezekiel 33:7-11; Psalm 119:33-40; Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 18:15-20

“Live as light for others”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

There is a sense of urgency to Paul’s words today. Paul writes, “*Now is the moment for you to awake from sleep...the night is far gone, the day is near.*” Now – not tomorrow – now is the moment to love one another. Paul states it this way because love is an urgent matter. Love is how I respond to my neighbor in need. Now is the moment because love is how we live out our promises and relationships with others. Love is God’s work through our hands in this world.

Paul uses that little word “moment,” *kairos* in Greek, to describe the moments when we must respond to someone in need. These are “moments” when we are grasped by God’s time seeking to work through our hands and voices with love for others in need.

Paul’s sense of urgency is also meant to be our urgency for this world. Now – not tomorrow, next week or next month – now is the moment that God is seeking to work through each of us with love for our neighbor. Now is the “moment” that extends into tomorrow because the love we show today, carries us into tomorrow.

Yet two thousand years after Paul wrote these words, the world is still in dire need of compassion and lovingkindness. Paul wants us, his listeners, not simply to think nice thoughts, but rather, Paul wants us to be moved to act with love for others in this world.

Paul and the earliest Christians understood that Christianity is not an abstract theology or a simply a written creed, rather it is the living ethic of love for others. Paul states clearly that the commandments against adultery, murder, theft, and covetousness are summed up in the words, “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*”

Imagine a world where the light of this love lived in every human heart; imagine a world where all people loved others as they love themselves. Paul is describing the “*agape* love” of God. *Agape* is a self-sacrificial love for others, always seeking to do what is best for one’s neighbor. The ethics of Christian love help us see that my own well-being is tied to the well-being of my neighbor. We have each been created to love and to be loved.

The New Testament is filled with this ethic of love as compassion and lovingkindness. For example, the Parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates “the moment” when loving compassion was urgently needed by someone along the road of life. All our daily journeys contain moments

when we can act for the good of our neighbor. Again, at the Last Supper, Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment, “*that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.*” (John 15:12-13). This is the love that Paul describes, it is a love that requires us to give of our own lives in service to others.

Paul is not describing abstract knowledge; he is describing our faith active in love for others. This is why Jesus in today’s gospel speaks so clearly about forgiveness. Forgiveness is that act of love that frees us and our neighbor from the past to live into the future together. The urgent moment to live with love gives humanity a future together.

This gospel passage is difficult because, as biblical scholars have noted, it doesn’t sound like Jesus. Jesus was the one who welcomed tax collectors and Gentiles, rather than using them as an example of judgment. However, what Jesus is describing is how we are to be reconciled with our sister or brother – we are to seek forgiveness when we have injured or been injured by someone. And if we cannot realize this forgiveness today, we are to turn in prayer seeking God’s help for tomorrow. When our prayers are unselfish, seeking God’s reconciliation and help, God helps us.

Jesus’ promise to be wherever two or three are gathered reminds us that Jesus is with us in our relationships. Jesus isn’t only present in large gatherings of hundreds of people. Jesus lives to work through human moments of need with love, compassion, and forgiveness. Jesus promises to be in every moment of our relationships.

I remember hearing someone once complain that they were always waiting “for Jesus to show up and he never does.” I have been haunted by this remark because Jesus does show up in this world – he shows up through us. He is the silent companion on all our journeys, walking between us and our neighbor, offering the reconciliation of love.

Jesus always shows up; the trouble is we don’t always notice. Blinded by our own stuff, our own baggage, our own hurts and fears, we do see him. We do not see him in our neighbor in need; we do not see him in the one we have injured; we do not see him in the one we have rejected. We may come into this church seeking God’s help and forgiveness, but we cannot love the God who we cannot see without loving the neighbor whom we have seen.

This is why Paul uses the image of light when he talks about love because the presence of light allows us to see in the darkness. In the darkness of brokenness and strife, light offers hope. Paul encourages us to put on the light of Christ. In putting on Christ, we become light in the darkness for others. When we seek the insight and the wisdom of Christ, it is the light of Christ that

enlightens us to be love and light in this world.

He is with two or three of us; he is in our relationships promising a light that will guide us with love and reconciliation. Though we can very often be blinded to others by our own pride and by our own hurts – it is the light of Christ that moves us from darkness into the light of love, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Jesus does show up in this world. He is always present, seeking to be alive through you wherever two or three are gathered. Seek him in prayer and share him with compassion. Live as light for others.

Now is the moment when you are needed as light for others in this world. Jesus is near to you and your neighbor. Call on him each day. Each day put on Christ as the garment of your baptism that moves you from death to life.

Live as light. Jesus needs you to be his forgiveness, compassion, and love in this world. You are light and love that overcomes all darkness. Amen.