

Philippians 2:12-18  
“Shine as Lights in the World”  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

May 12, 2019  
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Vicar Otterman

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, Our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

**[Introduction]**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

It can be hard to create new healthy habits. Regular exercise, eating a healthy diet, and introducing a new daily routine are all difficult to maintain when we are tempted to fall back into older and unhealthy habits.

There’s always going to be the friend who says “just take a break from your diet for today.” And you can always tell yourself “I don’t need to work on that project tonight. I think I’ll just binge watch a T.V. show instead.”

Self-motivation doesn’t always come easy.

As Christians living in a post-Christian world, we face the challenge of motivating ourselves to live differently than everyone else. The Apostle Paul tells us to maintain our purity as God’s children, even while we live in a world that actively rejects Him and encourages us to do the same.

**[Live Differently]**

He says, “Do all things without grumbling or disputing.” What better way to describe our world today, as a land filled with grumbling and disputing. We see this in the news, we see this in politics. We see this on the internet, in grocery stores, in families, at work, and on the road. It seems like wherever people are, they will find something to complain about and fight over.

As Christians we are not immune to the tendency of complaining. When you’re on the job, working in a culture that revolves around complaining, it takes intentional effort to stand apart and choose not to participate in the negativity that pervades most workplaces.

What's worse is when we let the negativity of the world invade the life of the church. It happens when we complain about someone else in the church, because of something they've said or done, or when we fight over things and forget to love each other as Jesus loves us.

**[A People Who Do Not Grumble or Dispute]**

Can you imagine what it would look like if an entire church lived in such a way that its people did not grumble or dispute amongst themselves?

In chapter one of Philippians, Paul gives us a glimpse of what this would look like when he writes: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." (*Philippians 2:3-4*)

This kind of community would be one where people listen to each other before making judgments, and where they would work together to find common ground, compromising and even placing the other person's needs and concerns above their own.

The members of this kind of community would talk and think about each other with generosity, always seeking to defend and lift up one another's reputations by explaining everything in the best possible light.

They would be gracious, forgiving and loving all people, even those who don't deserve it, because they always remember how Jesus forgave and loved them when he offered himself to die on the cross for them.

**[Lights in the World]**

The difference is striking between this beautiful picture that Paul presents to us and the ugliness of what we often see and experience in the world. It's like the contrast between light and darkness.

The world is in darkness. Paul describes it as crooked and twisted. Because they do not see the truth of the Gospel of Jesus, people wander, blindly trying to find hope in a world that has rejected the source of all hope.

In the book of John, Jesus says, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going.” (*John 12:35*)

As long as the world is in darkness, people are unable to come to faith in the one true source of life, Jesus. That is the very reason why he came to earth to become Human and to die on the cross as a servant. He shone his light of love and forgiveness into the world, so that the blind could see and walk in the light.

That is why Paul talks about us shining as “lights in the world.” When we model our lives around the kind of humility and selflessness that Jesus lived for us, we become lamps that shine His light into the world.

It’s not our light that we shine into the darkness, but Jesus’ light. Paul tells us this when he says, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” (*Philippians 2:12-13*)

It is our responsibility to live like lamps to the people of the world, but it is God working through us to spread the Gospel to the world.

Close your eyes and imagine a vision of the earth from outer space. It’s shadowed and dark, but then all of a sudden a bright light appears like a pinpoint on the earth. That’s Jesus shining his light into the world.

Then from out of that bright light, more lights appear and start moving across the earth, multiplying like a fire and illuminating everything as they spread north, south, east, and west. That’s you, the church, spreading the light of Christ to the ends of the earth.

### ***[Holding Fast to the Word of Life]***

But if it is God working in us to light the world, why doesn’t the church look more like the picture Paul paints for us? The problem is when we forget whose light we are shining.

When we try to shine our own light by our own power, we fall back into our old sinful habits, quickly burning out and acting just like the rest of the world.

When we hold fast to the Word of life, the Gospel message that Jesus died to forgive us of our sins, we are filled with his light. And when we cling to the promises of hope that we have in him, we can shine His light into the world.

That's why Paul is able to say, "Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me." (*Philippians 2:17-18*)

Paul rejoices and is glad while he is in prison and facing the threat of death, because he knows that in doing so, he shines the light of Jesus into the world. He already knows that death is not his final end and that he will be raised from the dead on the last day.

Paul's ultimate task is to continue to shine that light, so that more people will find their hope of salvation in Jesus. He urges the church in Philippi, and he urges you today to do the same.

Our motivation to live like no one else comes from Jesus, and our encouragement comes when we love and serve on another with our words and our actions. Together as brothers and sister, let us cling to the promise of life we have in the Gospel, that has been given to us in our baptisms, always rejoicing and shining like lamps into the world. Amen.

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"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

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