

Calvary United Methodist Church
November 10, 2019

LIGHTEN UP
Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher

Children's Message:

Ephesians 5:1-2

I invite our children to come for the children's message. Come on up. Good morning! Glad to see so many of you here this morning. It is nice for you to come up. Are you getting excited for the snow this week? (Yeah!) How many of you are excited for the snow this week? Why aren't they excited out there? Well, it comes when it wants to come.

I want to talk today about what it is to be an imitator. Have you ever imitated someone in your family? We copycat them. Have you ever done that? Sometimes my sisters and I would do that and we would get angry with each other. Did you ever do that? They are like kiddish games we do.

Well, there are sometimes being an imitator of someone else is really a good thing. I look at the other people and said: Boy, I wish I could throw a ball like they do. Or perhaps I wish I could run like they ran. I wish I could play an instrument or dance like someone. I wish... there are a lot of things we wish, but to make it happen we really have to practice to make some of this happen.

Jesus tells us that we ought to be an imitator of godly ways. So I want to read this scripture. It says: Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

We are imitators. Have you ever imitated anyone? Anyone out there? We do a lot of it through life, actually, a lot. I once read that little ducklings when they hatch, whatever they follow, like if they were around some other critter they would follow them too because they like to follow someone else to know what they are doing. We like to follow other people. I love to be around people who do things great.

And as it is other animals learn to copy as well. Can you imagine your dog, who do you think, the baby imitated the dog or the dog imitated the baby. What do you think?

How many know what these things are? They are parrots. Have you ever seen a parrot? You have. Have you ever heard them speak? No? Well, you gotta get a parrot! Do you realize parrots can have a vocabulary of like 60 to over 100 words? Now, do you think they read? No, they mimic or imitate. You say, "Good morning." And they say, "Good morning" or "Goodbye" or whatever it is. They learn to repeat. So many things, like you learn your ABCs, right, a long time ago, you learned by repeating them and getting them. We learned the Apostles' Creed that we just read. Many of us have read it so many times that we memorized

it. And there are many scriptures we do.

But there are many behaviors we get from watching people around us, like when we are infants we often mimic what we see our moms and dads and grandparents and sometimes as we get older we want to be like moms and dads, right? We like to try to imitate the same things.

I love this one. They are both very busy, aren't they? They can multiple task, do a lot of things at one time, but there is only one person that we really...it's nice to mimic and imitate these things because hopefully our parents and people around us are doing good things, but we are really to imitate God's Son, Jesus Christ, because he walked on earth and taught us. He taught us how to love. Are we supposed to love only certain people? All people. Are we supposed to help other people? All people that we can help. Are we supposed to be kind? To everybody. He taught us so many things. What about our words? Are they supposed to be mean words? No, only nice words. We should be uplifting things. There are so many things the Jesus taught us that when we do it, it's a great world. And we learn small, like you are small now, but as you grow in years you grow in knowledge and in experience and wisdom. So hopefully those of us who are older, we should be better imitators, shouldn't we? Shouldn't we? It doesn't always work that way, though, does it? Because sometimes we forget that we ought to be imitators of God's love.

Sometimes we get angry and sometimes we do things we shouldn't, but hopefully if we think quickly before we say too much and do too much danger or too many problems we think: I am an imitator of God. If you don't ask yourself, I encourage you to do start doing that. Especially when you get frustrated. It's so easy to do what I want to do and not think about walking in the ways of God.

Some of the ways of God you already do. How many of you have ever helped to put packages together for holidays or for someone in need? You've probably all done that, right? It's really known, all year is the season to give, but the Christmas season is the time when we really try to help out a lot of other people.

How many of you have ever gone on a run-a-thon or a walk-a-thon? (Child speaks.) That's a good thing. Acts of kindness are good for us to do all the time. Some people do the walk-a-thons, whatever it is that you can do you can do to make a difference. And coming here to worship, but it doesn't happen just here. We worship God in our hearts. It's so when we think of godly things, when we pray, when we read, when we study, when we go to church events (Child speaks.) You're 100%. Did you hear that sermon? It's not about the gifts. That's a great thing. Thank you for sharing it. It's all about Christmas, it's all about those gifts.

How many of you went trick or treating in the last few weeks? Did you get a lot of candy? It is nice to receive? How come you didn't bring me any? You know what is nicer than receiving? Sometimes it's giving, isn't it? Is it nice when someone gives you something?

God teaches it is okay to receive, it's a good thing because people love to receive and love to give you, but we also need to remember it's not just the stuff we give. We can give our hearts to God, just say: Lord, I want to be an imitator. We can give our hearts to other people and look after the people around us, our family and friends and help around the home and help grandparents and others.

But we show love in many ways. We show it through hugs and kisses to those who are acceptable in our family. We show it by sharing time with people. We do it by sharing with God, by praying and studying and doing those things. And a part of it is here, only a small part of every week. But what you learn here is what you take to be an imitator of God in the world.

We have this light, this power, this energy from God when we come here and when we take that energy, are we supposed to hold on to it? No, what do we talk about? Giving. It's good to give. It fills us with energy, but God says we gotta give that love, we gotta care, we gotta reach out and extend it to others.

I want you to look at this picture and tell me what's wrong. (Children speak.) It's a goose, not a penguin. It's an imposter penguin. God said He doesn't want imposter Christians. If we say we are a Christian that means we imitate God. There are a lot of people who say that, but when people look at them they say, "What? Did you hear those bad words come out of their mouth? Did you see what they did to those other people? They hurt them. They aren't very nice." See, that's an imposter.

Now, we all have bad days when we might look like an imposter, but when we wear the name of Christian, we should act like a Christian as often as we can and when we aren't acting we should say to God and others, "I'm sorry." It's calling acting and confessing that we are not yet perfect, because when we act like a Christian people are watching us and we are unified because we are stronger and it's easier to be a like-minded Christian when we work together.

So, as we leave this week, I want you to remember to be an imitator, to mimic God's love, to love others, to care for others, to share for others and make a difference.

Thank you for coming up this week. There are some fruit snacks there on your way out. Thank you.

GOSPEL LESSON:

The Gospel Lesson this week is speaking about light. I kind of like light. I like the warmth of light from the sun. I like a feeling brighter about it. God knew that we needed to lighten up about life and there are so many things that we believe about light, the energy it gives to most of us and so I invite you to hear this Word where he is telling us not only is he the light of the world, but you and I are the light, we are the imitators of Christ that somebody is look-

ing for. You and I cross the paths from the time we wake up in the morning with our family members in our home to coworkers, to people on the street. I've said it many times: you don't know what other people are going through. I walk through the medical centers and I walk in the nursing facilities and other places and people's heads are down and if you could be light, all of a sudden, guess what? They smile. They light up, because there is that hope that someone cares.

(Matthew 5:14-16)

Message:

Matthew 5:14-16

Lighten up! Have you ever been at a family gathering or holidays and people get on heavy subjects? You just say, "Whoa! Lighten up!" That's one kind of lighting up, but the other kind of lightening up is being hope for other people around us.

We are going to be talking about honesty here today. Do you still get afraid? I still get afraid sometimes. I've been in places in the world, I've thought, "Jeff, you are a grown man. Why are you afraid?" Oh, I've been in some dark places sometimes. So, I tried to look for places of fear and I typed in, "Man with arm over bed." He still can't do it. You know what I mean? It's the bravest man in the world, you can see, with his arm over the bed, because you know what's going to grab you in the middle of the night, right? The monster under the bed. They couldn't even find a photo on the internet with a man with his arm hanging over his bed.

It's amazing what nighttime does to us. I live alone and so it's one thing when my eyes are googling all over the place, but if you ever have one of those nights you wake up and you see this and you are living alone you think this isn't good! Nights when you get a call: we don't expect your mother to make it through the night; someone was in a bad accident; we can't find someone with snow out. Want to make the list long? Nights are longer. There are like 40 hours in a night when it is a night like that, right? And you are waiting for morning to come, you are waiting just for the glimpse of new light and new hope, because even if you have to face those phone calls and emergencies and going to clinic or hospitals and finding news it seems so much different in the light of day.

But it's not just that kind of light, it's sometimes we are kept in the dark. Do you know what I mean? Several times in recent years, I'll get a call from my sister and I try to check on my mother every day and I didn't hear and I didn't hear, I thought we'll they are out busy. She was in the hospital yesterday. Why didn't you call me? Well, we didn't want to bother you, we know you are busy. That's being kept in the dark. Is there anyone here to likes to be kept in the dark? Nada. That's like finding out your furnace has blown up and you owe \$5,000. I'm not going to tell my spouse, I know I'll get all upset about it.

Being in the dark isn't a good place either. Darkness and most things about it, other than being able to catch a little sleep, most of us aren't too fond of the dark. We like light, because

light is hope. Some years ago I shared in a wedding out at Stanford University and I slipped down afterwards to Alcatraz, a very interesting prison. It's now a national park. And in that place which is a cold, damp, breezy place that I'd never want to live, I went into a cell which is about 4 ft. by 8 ft. There is one little window that they only opened to put the food in and other than that it's shut and the prisoner in those days would stay in there 24 hours a day for I think 3 to 7 days as punishment for being a bad inmate. It was so torturous the men said they would pull a button off of their shirt and flip it around and try to hunt for it because they didn't know what day, what hour, what...they lost all track of time and you go all but insane, because we need that glimmer of light to save us.

I didn't realize the power of light until I became a pastor. I grew up in a church like these little children all the days of my life and I always loved Christmas, but my first Christmas in my first parish, I stood up there and all the lights of the house are dim and I went to the Advent Candle, the Christ Candle and I lit the candle and all the lights of the house were dark. And I had one little candle. I used to love to sing that song, Just One Little Candle. And one by one it peace of Christ was passed through that candle and the church came alive. To this day, I choke up thinking about it. It reminds me of the power of one person, you. You are the light of Christ to someone you pass on the street, to someone in your household, to a member or family or friend with a phone call to a note of encouragement. You are the only light for somebody that's praying for some hope, some glimmer of hope, some glimmer of Christ, some glimmer of salvation in their life that seems to be going nowhere. Just you becoming bright, you being the living light of Christ. You waving that light out there, changes the world around you. For you are indeed, through Christ the light of the world. There is somebody, probably a lot of somebodies who need you to be light and we don't just take that light, it does feel good and it fills us up, but we are to take this light and we are to give it.

If you keep a flashlight to yourself it is not much help. When I used to walk with Dad in the woods he would often keep it in front of him and it doesn't do me a lot of good. You need to hold your light high and you need to be bright and you need to be full of the light of Christ. And particularly, I mentioned to the children, the words that come out. Let our words, pray the prayer, bitterness and envy and pride and ignorance and mean and nastiness and cussing, Lord, take it away and let my words be light. If they aren't light, let them be silent. Our world is so filled with vulgarity and nasty now and God is saying: I want light. I want hope. I want a future. And so it is.

The scripture said that you never take your light and hide it under a bushel, right? You want to use the light to the best it can be. And so you hang it high and realize you have the power to make a difference with the light you have. You have the power because light...what's light? It's energy. The sun is the energy that feeds us.

God says through scriptures that we are both salt and light and I never really appreciated because I don't remember salting much as a young man, but if you take something, I don't care what it is, a piece of broccoli or whatever else and you put just a little bit of salt on it and you

put it in your mouth, it's like whoa! It changed the world. And you know what, a spicy Christian is just that way. He said: If you are not salt, you are nothing! You don't have anything to give the world if you are not filled with salt and light, you have nothing.

But light is energy and we get that energy. And so it was that Jesus went from individual to individual, disciple to disciple, building up crowds and he was a light and he was the energy. And you know what it's like when someone has that; you want to be around them. You want to take it. God says: I'm giving it to you, but don't hold on. Take a light and pass it. Give it to those around you that they too might find light. For you are the salt of the earth and you are the light.

This energy that we have, it is supposed to be 20 on Tuesday. I don't know about you, but that's pretty cold. But I know this: when you stand outside and you are stuck in a parking lot and you start talking to someone and a cloud moves and the sun hits you, what happens? It's like, whoa! It heats you up just from that sun.

I've sat with people in waiting rooms a lot through my years. You know what heats them up? The light of God's love that is shared with them, a prayer, a word of hope, a promise of scripture, a promise of a new day, a promise that they will not be alone. You are light for somebody and you have that ability. When we absorb that light, it's like the divine presence, God warming me up.

Sometimes in the fall I like to sit under a tree in the cold, actually I go hunting. I haven't hunted really in 20 years, but I've sat under a lot of trees. And it's freezing in the morning and all of a sudden, sunrise comes and as the sun gets higher and higher and higher, it is so peaceful. Just a total peace, as the glistening through the trees. And it heats you up.

Have you ever been alone and lonely? And you are somewhere on a park bench or at the seaside and something just warms your heart. To me that is the light of Christ.

Jesus spoke to them again saying I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life (John 8:12)

The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord in the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1)

God says His light is sufficient. We need to fear nothing. When I think about fear and the fact that I still have those fears in life, whether it is going on the stage in front of people, whether it is doing something you have never done before, whether it is reaching out in new relationships, we all have fears of some kind. Sometimes fear involves shame of things that were done to us and in that case, may God grant you healing, because we can't control what other people did to us, but we can certainly control our lives and what we are with others.

God said: My light will shine through you and I will bring healing to you. Do not allow fear to enter our lives. Fear is a liar.

I love this thing I saw a few weeks ago: Fear, two options: Forget everything and run...it's easy to do that, right? Or face everything and rise. I like that. And quite frankly, there is a place for both. There are places you can get in that you don't want to be in, but there are a lot of times we need not fear. We need to face our problems, whether it is our debts and say how am I going to get out of here, instead of ignoring it I am going to do something about it. Whether it is in a relationship that's good or bad. Do you say, you know what? We are going to take it to a new level or I'm going to be bold enough to say look, this is going nowhere, I'm moving on. We need to be able to be bold enough to know that we are never alone and we need to let our light shine because God is with us. We need to shine brightly.

I was trying to think of an example and it wasn't until last evening I thought of this on the highways. In the last two decades we have these reflectors. At first when they were putting them in I thought what in the world are they doing? Now with older eyes, I really appreciate seeing where the middle line is. How about you? Or not only the middle, the sidelines. Why are they there? They protect us. They keep us in line. They keep us aware of what is going on.

You know why it is important for you to be light of Christ? You are a reflector. There is someone looking to you and especially young ones look to us. I look to others as well and I've learned from children, I've learned from youth, I've learned from adults, people are watching and they are wanting to see a light and they are wanting to see the reflection of Christ in your life.

You and I are here to help people stay on the path. When you have a bunch of friends going down a wrong path and they want to invite you, wow! That's not being a good reflector.

I have some family members who have had alcohol issues through the years and in and out of prison and in and out of abuse centers and I'll say to them when they come: Look, I'm not down on your friends, but you'll go to your friends and they will say, well, just have one with us. You can't have one. That's not a friend. You see, friends are light. Friends don't pull us down. Friends lift us up. So, in any situation, whether it is in school, whether it is in relationships, whether it is in family, God says we need to pull one another up, not put one another down. And so it is that we are reflectors.

We're here about seeking the lost, but we are also about saving the lost. Those who need that light, they need to see it in us. If we are not light, if we are darkness, we are not going to be saving anybody. We have to have the love of Christ inside us.

What is the function of light? I'd just like to look at three quick things: Exposing darkness, serving as a guide and being seen. All of us have probably at some point in our life seen the

deer in spotlight type thing. You know, once it's seen we can do something about it, right? Darkness by itself is not a bad thing, but when we put light in it we can see. Have you ever stubbed your foot in the dark? There is a reason. I do it even in the daylight sometimes, but there's a reason we like to turn on a light when you are walking around in the dark. Or stairwells and things like that? You see, we expose all kinds of things. When is most crime done? Night. Why? You can't see it as much, hoping not to be caught. Where do we...we could walk down a street, some streets in Harrisburg in the daytime and not have a problem and in the night you say: going in to Harrisburg? No! I'm not going in there. Not in the middle of the night. Why? Because it's dark and you can't see what's going on around you.

Light exposes the problems. Light serves as a guide. I love those crazy men movies like Airplane. I don't know if you saw, it's an old funny one probably done 25 years ago. And the guy in the tower was having a fit with the guy in the plane and he got so mad he unplugged the light and all the lights on the runway went dead. Now, thank God, I don't think it happens that way. If you have ever flown over an airport you'll see all kinds of lights. I have no idea where the blues, the greens, the yellows, probably some take you into the place where you are unloading passengers, others are runways. You know, it's pretty important that they are there. They are a guide to keep them on a path for safety and for life and for protection.

You are a light. Can you hear this any clearer? You are a light, for the safety, for the protection, for the guidance, for the leadership of those around you. Somebody is looking to you and they will say: Lord, I need light today. I've lost a loved one and I've lost hope. Lord, I need light today because I'm in a relationship that's so disruptive and painful and perhaps abusive. I don't know what to do. Someone needs to be light for me. It can be a hopeless situation in so many ways. We are light to expose darkness and when we do that, things get better. We don't hide it under a bushel, why? Because it doesn't do much good if the light is hidden. When we hang lights, mostly in the house, you don't put them on the floor, do you? We do have little nightlights and stuff, but mostly the higher you hang it, the more light comes out from it.

When I was studying this I looked up in the Palestinian homes in those days, they had little wee lamps and you can still find them around the world in places because they didn't have electric, surprise. They didn't have all the nice wonderful wax candles we have today. The burned animal fat or olive oil and they used that and they used it to light their home. And their homes usually only had one window. There is a lot of reasons people around the world in places I go still only have one very small window. It keeps critters out, but it lets limited light in. Very limited light for your protection. You see, we need light for our protection. It gives us strength.

I read a story of a guy who before they had all the trains, the lights and stuff on and dangers, there had been a railroad mishap and when they did that in those days, actually I have a book of my grandfather's from 1911, it started in 1901, records the great fire in Chicago and peo-

ple would walk so many miles of track every day to make sure there were no pins out and it was safe for trains. And this man was supposed to be out there if there were any problems, stopping the trains and waving their lantern. And as it was, this train wrecked that night and the guard was called in before the judge and he said: Were you indeed working that night? And he said: Yes, sir, I was. And he said: Did you have your lantern with you that night? Yes, I did. And were you waving your lantern. The guy said: Yes, I did. He said: Then you are off of this case. The guy went home and told his friends, he says: I'm glad the judge didn't ask if it was lit.

Well, folks, there are a lot of Christians who are like that goose dressed up as a penguin, we are counterfeit, we are imposters, because our light isn't lit.

I don't know what it will take to light your fire, to light your light, but we need to be lit. We need to hold our lantern. People need to say there is hope, there is light, there are possibilities because the world we live isn't easy. We need to dare, if you will, to dispel all the darkness around us.

Here this from the Prophet Isaiah: Arise, shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you.

God's light is in you and you are entrusted to take it, to speak it, to act it, to do deeds and as we are that people who shine, it will shine from within. We don't need any spotlights telling people we are Christian, they will see that we are different. I've heard it and read it several times this summer: Mirror, Mirror on the wall. Do you see Christ in me at all?

If you are light of Christ, people will see it. You don't need to tell them you are a Christian, they will know that you are that light. They will know that you are the one walking through the door and people say, like when their face is down, you walk in and go...you can just see them light up because of your very presence. You are the presence of Almighty God.

We will hold our light up and we will give light to the world, realizing that Jesus Christ said: I am the light of the World. And he said to us: What? Our call today: God and be the light of Jesus Christ.

I know you have it. I know you know it. Now we need to do it. Amen.