

Theme: **Together many lights are brighter**

Text: Romans 15: 4 – 7

Season: 2nd Wednesday in Advent

Date: December 6, 2017

Place: Shepherd of the Rockies LCMS, Bailey, Co

*Grace and peace to you as you let the light of God shine in your life, from God, our Father, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Last week we talked about the routine that many of us go through as we prepare for the coming of Christ during the Advent season. We talked about going out into the woods or to a tree farm and finding that perfect tree, then bringing it home and getting it all set up and ready for the lights. That begins the next routine. How do you put on the lights? Do you start from the top of the tree and work your way down or do you start from where it has to be plugged in at the bottom of the tree and work our way up to the top? Do you hang the lights going around and around the tree in a spiral or do you hang them down in straight or with waving lines and then work you way back up again and back down again? There are many different ways of laying out the light on a Christmas tree and each way will give a different appearance just like the color of the lights that you use can give a different appearance to the tree. So what is our preference? I don't know about you, but I like it when the lights are evenly spread out around the tree in a spiral pattern, starting from the top and going to the bottom. Now through the years in putting on the lights on our Christmas tree that way I've found that I have a tendency to get more lights on the bottom than on the top. So when I have gotten all the light on the tree, I turn on the lights and stand back and look at the tree and ask Glenda or someone else look at the tree with me to see where I have to move lights so there are no pare spots or places were there are to many lights. I don't know about you, but I like lights, especially this time of the year for the lights seem to bring out the joy of the coming of Christ.

Last week we heard the Apostle Paul talk about the routine that we need to get involve with as we prepare for the coming of Christ, the light of the world. This week in our Epistle and our Gospel readings we are reminded that we need to work together to shine the light of God's love out into this world. We are given the light of God in our lives through God's love shown to us by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God's Only Son. That's God's love given to us as a hope of light shining out into the darkness of this world.

(Point to the Christmas tree that is all lit up.) Can you imagine what this Christmas tree would look like if there was only one light shining on this whole tree? It would defiantly look different, wouldn't it? If there was only one person in the whole community shining the light of God out into the community it would make the community look quiet different also. Just as

the more lights that you put on the Christmas tree makes the tree look better so also the more lights that we shine out into our community will enable our community to feel the love, peace and joy that God wants to give to us all. Many lights together bring praise to God, for as believers in Christ Jesus we are united in the hope He has won for us by His life, death and resurrection. That hope is the reason why we are able to shine individually and we can shine even brighter together for all the world to see.

The Apostle Paul reminds us where our hope comes from, as he says, **“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”** (Rom. 15:4) Now you have to remember that the Apostle Paul is talking about the Old Testament. Unfortunately, there are many people today who shy away from the Old Testament, as they find it difficult to hear and difficult to understand the hope that was promised there and throughout Scripture. Without this hope, we are like lights strung on a tree and disconnected from its power source. (Turn off the light on the tree.) When we look to ourselves to provide a source of hope, we fail and find ourselves totally unplugged – in the darkness of the world trying to cover our sinfulness. Do you remember Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden? After they ate from the forbidden tree, God came looking for them, but they hid in the darkness provided by the world to cover their sins. Or what about King David, the man who hid in the darkness of murder to cover his sin with Bathsheba. Without hope, we are nothing more than sinful men and women lost in darkness and unable to see God’s gracious light, which lightens the pathway to forgiveness and life everlasting.

Without hope, there’s always an “every man for himself” mentality. Picture a sinking ship. On that dark night in the North Atlantic of April 15, 1912, as the Titanic was taking on water and going down, the orchestra calmly played “Nearer, My God, to thee.” They allowed others to get into the lifeboats as they themselves faced certain death. That’s hope, knowing that at the moment of death we will be with our Lord face to face. Meanwhile, other passengers scrambled, pushed one another out of the way, desperate for one of the precious seats in a lifeboat. A man disguised himself as a woman to be on the boats with the women and children who went first. Some tried to bribe their way to safety with something as worthless as money. Me! It’s all about me when there is no hope!

(Turn on the Christmas Tree lights) When we are connected to God though we are given hope – through His Word. In this hope, we receive the endurance and encouragement to confess

and repent of our sins, knowing that we will be forgiven and strengthened. **“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”** (Rom. 15:4)

Of course, the sum total of all of the Scriptures is Jesus Christ. Jesus is our hope that unites us to God – the source of our strength, life and salvation – thereby uniting us to one another as the family of Christ. In the Gospel of Luke after Jesus had risen from the dead, He explained to the disciples the entire meaning of the Old Testament as **“He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,<sup>46</sup> and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,<sup>47</sup> and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”** (Lk 24:45 – 47) The Old Testament is all about Jesus, our Savior, the hope of the world. Our hope that was once prophesied through Isaiah when he wrote, **“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”** (Isa 9:6) Our hope, Jesus Christ, would be the Lamb and sacrifice Himself for the sins of all people once and for all. Jesus Christ would not remain dead but would rise again and live forever, uniting us through His blood shed on the Cross of Calvary.

Before His betrayal and arrest, Jesus prayed His High Priestly Prayer, asking His heavenly Father to unite us as He was united with Him, He said, **“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word,<sup>21</sup> that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.”** (Jn 17:20 – 21) The Apostle Paul ask this same thing of God as he says, **“May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,<sup>6</sup> that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** (Rom. 15:5– 6)

Just as many light on a Christmas tree are brighter together, so are the united praises of many people when glorifying God. As the many lights are joined by one strand, we, too, are joined together by the One source of light, Christ. We are joined through the gift of salvation through Christ-given to us out of the grace of God in the Good News that our sins are forgiven through His blood and righteousness, given to us in our Baptism and strengthened in us when we receive His very body and blood in His supper. It is only through our gathering together

before God at His altar that we receive His Word and Sacraments, lifting our voices in prayer, praise and thanksgiving to our gracious God.

**“Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”**

(Rom 15:7) Those are the Apostle Paul’s words to us. Welcoming one another as fellow members of the family of Christ is not always and easy thing. The Apostle Paul knew this was true as he continued to reach out and encourage each of us to live in the love and righteousness given to us by God’s love. Sinful pride is a terrible thing to stand between redeemed brothers and sisters in Christ. It makes it difficult, if not impossible; to receive one another as Christ has done for us.

Jesus doesn’t receive us because we may be richer or smarter or because we have a stronger Lutheran heritage. No, Jesus receives each of us because of His mercy, and when we understand this, the darkness caused by our sinful pride will begin to melt away. The darkness of “every man for himself” gives way to hope and peace. The brightness of God’s mercy will shine within us, enabling us to join with others in the brightness of Christ.

Flying east across the mountains on a clear evening allows a person to see the importance of even a single light in the darkness of the world. As you look down from your airplane you will see an individual light here and there. Looking up and off into the distance, a glow begins to appear after a while. As the plane gets closer and closer to Denver and the front range that glow becomes greater and brighter, and soon you can see the expanse of the city where all the individual lights are shining together, creating a brightness that can be seen even from outer space.

As brothers and sisters in the hope of Christ, we have been united as individuals who share in the blessing and mercies of God. We have found hope in God’s Word and that hope has given us a peace that is beyond the worlds understanding. The darkness that once covered the world has been pierced with the light of Christ when He came as a baby in Bethlehem so many years ago. The darkness of our sins has been removed by His very blood on the cross. Yes, the world has seen a great light, the light that shines in the darkness, enlightening our lives with God’s grace and mercy, uniting us together, for together many lights are brighter and a greater light gives us a peace that the darkened world is looking for. Amen.