

# Children of the Light

A Sermon by Jeffrey K. Krehbiel

Stewardship Sunday

November 16, 2008

Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

*“You are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness.” (vs. 5)*

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***“Until that day comes, we are to prepare for it, watch for it, live in to it, as if it were just around the corner.”***

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The Obama transition process has given us, I think, a wonderful image for the roll of the church in the world. The Bush administration is still in power, but already the Obama team is getting ready for when power will change hands. The inauguration is still some time away, but already they are starting to live in to the new reality of an Obama administration. Obama may not yet be president, but already the mood is shifting in Washington.

So here's the image I've come up with: The Church is called to be Jesus' permanent transition team.

Now, Paul and his contemporaries in the early church apparently thought the transition was just around the corner. He offers words of encouragement born out of the shock that some believers have died before Jesus' return. After 2,000 years of waiting, we're not exactly sitting on the edge of our seats. Yet I am persuaded that it is just as vital for us to live in to that new reality as it was for the early Christians 2,000 years ago. What Paul called “the day of the Lord” is not something for us to fear, but something for us to anticipate, when what Jesus called “the kingdom of God,” or the “reign” of God, comes upon the world in all its fullness. Until that day comes, we are to prepare for it, watch for it, live in to it, as if it were just around the corner. The powers that be may still rule the world, but we are to live as citizens of another realm, as Paul put it, as children of light and not children of the darkness.

I attended a conference last week up at Stony Point, a Presbyterian conference center north of New York City, that

focused on evangelism. For many Presbyterians, that's a word that gives us hives, because we assume it means something about going up to strangers or knocking on doors and persuading people to believe things they don't want to believe. At Church of the Pilgrims, and many other congregations, we have come to understand evangelism differently. Evangelism doesn't mean persuading people to believe certain things so much as it means inviting people to live in a new way. To believe in Jesus, to trust in Jesus, to be a follower of Jesus, means to try and live our lives in the way that Jesus modeled.

The late Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder suggests that the church was called into being by Jesus to be a community that shapes and forms us into this new way of life, a new way of life that Jesus gave to his followers. Yoder writes,

*“[Jesus] gave them a new way to deal with offenders— by forgiving them. He gave them a new way to deal with violence— by suffering. He gave them a new way to deal with money— by sharing it. He gave them a new way to deal with problems of leadership— by drawing on the gift of every member, even the most humble. He gave them a new way to deal with a corrupt society— by building a new order, not making the old. He gave them a new pattern of relationships between man and woman, between parent and child, between master and slave, in which was made concrete a radical new vision of what it means to be a human person.”*

This is what Paul means when he says that we are called to be “children of light.” Now, let's be honest. Most of us don't

think of ourselves as “children of light,” and frankly, it is probably dangerous for us to do so. Dividing up the world into children of light and children of darkness, the good and the evil, the saved and the damned, us and them, is not going to lead us to the way of Jesus. We know ourselves too well to say that we are on the side of light and others are not. At the same time, it is imperative for us to see ourselves as called by Jesus to live by an alternative set of values that places us in tension with the prevailing values of our culture.

At the conference I attended last week, Rick Ufford-Chase, the former moderator of the Presbyterian Church, who is now director both of Stony Point Conference Center and the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, spoke for many of us when he said, “I have no interest in having people join the church even if they can stand up and recite the Apostles’ Creed, if they are just going to go back out in to the world and live in the midst of Empire just as they did before. I want to help form disciples of Jesus who are going to go back out in to the world and struggle every day with what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ in the midst of Empire.”

**S**o, this is Stewardship Sunday, and you may be wondering what any of this has to do with Stewardship. I’m so glad you asked! In the letter Calva wrote to you last week she used the phrase, “Stewardship is discipleship— Discipleship is stewardship.” The commitments we are asked to make today are but one small way that we try to live as children of the light. How we spend out time, what we give our passions to, and yes, how we spend out

money, are all a part of how we live out the values of our faith in our daily lives. Stewardship is not ultimately about the church, or this building, or how we pay the pastor’s salary— though all of those things have their place (especially that last part!). It’s about how we live our lives before God and with our neighbor. So in addition to asking for your financial commitment for the coming year, you are invited to reflect today on how you will practice such things as hospitality, and community, and healing, and Sabbath-keeping, and justice-making.

The theologian Stanley Hauerwas puts it in this way:

*The church does not exist to teach us how to be good Americans, or how to make Christianity “cool.” The church exists to form us, through the power of the Holy Spirit, into the likeness of Christ.*

*There’s no need to make the gospel “relevant” to the current culture. Jesus doesn’t care about being relevant; rather, Jesus cares about making disciples, about drawing people into the community called church that embodies the life-giving politics made possible through his life, death and resurrection.*

*Jesus does not promise that we will be made safe. Rather, this Savior offers to free us from our self-inflicted fears and anxieties.*

*Jesus does so, not by making our lives “more meaningful,” though we may discover our lives have renewed purpose, but by making us members of his body so that we can share in the goods of a community that is an alternative to the world.*

*As followers of Christ we may be hated and rejected, but we have been given such wonderful work that we may hardly notice.*

*Why did Jesus have to die? Jesus died to show us life is about God— not us. That is the good news of the gospel!*

*We are not left to our own devices. We are not in charge of our destinies. Jesus is our destiny. Jesus died so that we might find life, and life abundantly, in him.*

Through out this Homecoming season, we have been focusing on the theme, “Living in God’s Way.” Or, to put it another way, we have been reflecting on what it means to live as “children of the light,” part of Jesus “permanent transition team.”

To help us reflect more deeply on what that might mean specifically for the way we live our lives, we have been asking different members and friends of the congregation to share how they are living out their faith through particular practices. Most of these practices are not exclusively Christian, but rather as examples of faith-inspired practices that grow out of our relationship with God in Jesus Christ. Together, these practices form a way of life, a way of life sorely needed by our hurting and broken world.

Today, appropriately, Stacy Pervall will share on the spiritual practice of giving. †

[You can read Stacy’s story, all the stories of “Living in God’s Way” at <http://www.churchofthepilgrims.org/homecomingstories.html> ]