

“Throw Open the Shutters”
The Rev. S. Shane Nanney ~ March 15, 2026
Ephesians 5:8-14 and John 9:1-12

There’s a little boy who walked into the kitchen one Saturday morning and announced to his mother, “I’ve decided I’m afraid of the dark.”

His mother, who had been awake since 5:30 and already negotiated with the coffee maker twice, said, “You weren’t afraid of the dark yesterday.”

The boy nodded solemnly. “That was before I found out what’s in it.”

“Well,” she asked carefully, “what’s in it?”

He whispered, “Everything.”

Now that is good theology for a six-year-old.

Because if we’re honest, most of us are not afraid of the dark until we start thinking about what’s in it. And once we start thinking about what’s in it—regrets, failures, what other people think, what we’ve avoided, what we’ve done—we would just as soon flip the light off and go back to pretending.

Which brings us to two scriptures that refuse to let us pretend.

In Ephesians, Paul says, “ONCE YOU WERE DARKNESS, BUT NOW IN THE LORD YOU ARE LIGHT. LIVE AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT.” Not “visit the light occasionally.” Not “admire the light from a safe distance.” Live in it.

Paul is writing to a young Christian community trying to figure out what faith actually looks like in ordinary life. These were not perfect people floating three inches above the ground with halos gently humming over their heads. These were shopkeepers, laborers, parents with loud children, people who had spent most of their lives surrounded by a culture that operated very differently from the life Christ was calling them into. The old habits were still there. The old instincts—to hide, to blend in, to keep faith private and comfortable—were strong. So, Paul does not simply give them theology; he gives them identity. He reminds them that Christ has fundamentally changed who they are. They are not just people trying to be better in the dark. They have been brought into the light itself. And that means something has shifted at the core of their lives. The light of Christ is not a spotlight we step into on Sundays; it is the new atmosphere we are meant to breathe all week long. Paul is inviting them—and

us—to understand that faith is not about occasionally glancing toward the light, but about rearranging our lives so that we live there.

And in John chapter 9, Jesus encounters a man born blind. The disciples want a tidy explanation. “WHO SINNED?” they ask. Because we like our darkness organized. We prefer categories. We like to believe that if something is wrong, someone must have done something to deserve it.

In the world Jesus lived in, many people assumed suffering had a clear spiritual cause. If someone was born blind, crippled, or poor, people often believed there must have been some moral failure somewhere in the family line. Either the person sinned, or their parents did, or someone angered God along the way. It was a way of explaining hardship that allowed everyone else to feel safe. If suffering always had a tidy explanation, then maybe you could avoid it by living carefully enough. But Jesus refuses to play that game. Instead of assigning blame, he redirects attention entirely.

This man’s blindness, Jesus says, is not a courtroom case waiting for a verdict—it is an opportunity for the work of God to be revealed. And then, in a moment that is both strange and deeply human, Jesus kneels, mixes dirt with his own spit, and presses the mud onto the man’s eyes. The Creator of light literally places earth and breath together and begins a healing. The man washes, and suddenly the world he has only known through sound and touch bursts into color and shape. But what follows is even more remarkable than the miracle itself. The man who once lived unnoticed on the margins now stands in the middle of a community wrestling with what light actually means. His physical sight is restored instantly, but the deeper revelation—the understanding of who Jesus truly is—unfolds slowly, step by step, as the light continues to grow around him.

Now that’s a story about eyesight, yes. But it is even more a story about light.

Paul says we were once darkness—not “in” darkness, but darkness itself. Which sounds harsh until you realize he’s not scolding; he’s reminding. There was a time when we stumbled around without clarity, when we didn’t see ourselves clearly, when we mistook shadows for substance.

But now, he says, you are light.

Light doesn't just help you find your shoes in the morning. Light grows things. Light warms what has gone cold. Light disinfects what has been festering. Light reveals beauty that was invisible in the gloom.

Think about spring break. Every March, sensible adults suddenly decide they would like to sit in traffic for twelve hours just to lie on sand. Why? For the sun. For that warmth on their faces that says, "You're alive."

Nobody says, "Let's vacation in a cave." We crave light because it brings life. So why do we resist it spiritually? Because light also tells the truth.

Have you ever cleaned the house at night with only a lamp on and thought, "This looks pretty good"? Then morning comes, sunlight pours through the window, and you see dust floating like it has been holding a convention?

Light is honest.

And honesty can feel vulnerable.

The man in John 9 receives sight, and immediately life becomes more complicated. Before, he was overlooked. After, he is questioned. Debated. Pressured. Light does not just illuminate; it disrupts comfortable arrangements.

But notice: it also liberates.

The man says, "ONE THING I DO KNOW, THAT THOUGH I WAS BLIND, NOW I SEE." That is freedom talking.

We avoid the light because we are afraid it will take something from us—our illusions, our carefully managed image, our favorite excuses.

And it will.

But it will give us something better.

Clarity. Warmth. Growth. The quiet confidence of someone who no longer has to pretend.

The power of light is not just that it exposes; it transforms. Paul calls it fruit—goodness, righteousness, truth. These are not achievements we polish. They are growth that happens when we stay in the sun long enough.

Now let me end with this.

A man once bought an old farmhouse. It had been shuttered for years. The windows were boarded up, the curtains drawn tight. Inside, the air was stale and heavy. You could feel the years of darkness in the walls.

The first thing he did was not repaint. Not redecorate.

He opened every window.

Boards came down. Curtains were pulled back. Sunlight flooded in, bold and unapologetic. Dust rose in golden clouds. The place looked worse before it looked better. Every flaw showed. Every crack stood out.

But then something happened.

The air changed. The smell lifted. Rooms that had felt small suddenly seemed wide and possible.

He later remarked, “The house just needed light. Everything else followed.”

Friends, that is what Christ does.

“AWAKE, O SLEEPER,” Paul says, “AND CHRIST WILL SHINE ON YOU.”

Not to shame you. Not to interrogate you. But to open the windows of your life and let fresh air in.

Yes, the dust will swirl for a while. Yes, you may see cracks you had ignored. But you will also breathe again. You will grow again. You will see again.

Once you were darkness.

Now you are light.

So throw open the shutters.

Let the sun in.

And watch what begins to live. Amen.