

Did you have a chance to see the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games? So on Friday some of you have, um, they can do some pretty incredible things when people work together with a plan and when they use the light and interesting and fascinating ways. I was fascinated by how, by the way, that the whole, the floor seems to be a big screen somehow is lit up and it had images and it's just a fascinating thing to be able to think about how light can be used in our lives. And then when the athletes were entering the stadium, there's that moment where you, uh, you know, they, they, they brought the camera along where you were in the tunnel that was leading up to it and then all open up with the, uh, with the sky and with the athletes and stepping into the light and the new way.

This is part of what we're considering in our series about what does it mean to live in the light. We're looking at this story of the Olympic torch relay. We saw the pathway that it took a through Korea and thinking about our lives as Christians. How is it that we are called to live in the light of Christ last week because they're the scripture which Jesus tells his followers in the sermon on the mount that he says, you are the light of the world, and when he says that the word you, all of you together as a group collectively are the light of the world. Part of what we understand our calling as Christians is to share the light of God with other people. It's not a light that comes from us. It's, it's God's light. And so today we're going to take a closer look about what does it mean to live in a light if we're called to be the light of the world.

How do we live our lives in such a way that we are as fully in God's light as possible. As we begin, I want to just remind you that one of the things that is true about our life as Christians is that it's not. It's sometimes at different, uh, then, uh, the lives that other people live living as a follower of Jesus is not something that matches always, uh, the way that our culture seems to want us to live. There's things that set us apart. This was especially true up perhaps in the early, um, in early Christianity when I'm believing I'm being a follower of Jesus was something that was punishable by death. And as you know, in some places today, it's not a legal thing to be able to follow after Jesus. And so there's, there's a cost to living as a disciple and even for us here today and Eldorado and Butler county, there may not be punishments like that, but for some they might find that, that other people look at you differently.

If you start to change your patterns of faith, maybe you start coming to worship more regularly or maybe you join a small group or maybe you say, Hey, I think I want to not do that anymore because God is calling me to live in a different way. We're called to be different. For a, one of the things that's true about light is that it's different than darkness. It's a, it's a contrast, and of course sometimes it's a very hard line between why a dark and light, but sometimes it's, it's a, a blur across that. And if you think about what we're called to be in the world, Jesus call is to be the light of the world. And that means it's something different than the surroundings. It's difficult to have a picture of what light is. If it's all the same, it's easier and perhaps more true to picture, um, light in opposition to other things or perhaps an intensity difference in that light.

It's easier to be a, uh, it's easier to be the light when we are with other people that are also seeking to be in the light. That's part of why I believe Jesus encouragement was that we would be in community with one another. It says where two or three are gathered together. I am, I'm there with you. When we're in a group, we can do this life as Christians better as part of why we're here, provide you to be a part of Wesley small group to try it out for a couple of weeks and say, what do I find about my life? Is it actually easier to share my life with others? You'll find in your bullets in there a guide for Wesley small groups that they use that guide us to study the scriptures and to ask questions about faith and was our invitation. It's one tool that we want to offer to you to be able to live in the light more fully.

This past week I was traveling to a continuing education event and one example of, of easier to, uh, be a part of a group to live in a particular way when you're with a group for me was, um, when I was at the airport. So I happened to be flying last Sunday evening flying in Philadelphia. And, uh, it was an exciting time. You imagine we got to watch the superbowl. They're on the game and we landed, which was a couple minutes left. And as I'm walking into the terminal there until Adelphia every TV screen, of course has the game on and, and, and every person in the terminal is huddled around one screen or another. And I thought, you know, I'm not a big eagles fan. I'm definitely not a patriots fan and uh, but I thought, well, you know, whatever's going to happen by that point, they're probably already going to win the game.

But, but just in the last couple of seconds, I just had to stop and watch the last few seconds. And then when they finally one, it's just a, you know, I started cheering again. I, I'm no big eagles fan, but I was there in that place. And, and everyone else was a fan at that moment. So it is perhaps I think in our life of following Jesus, if we're with other people that are trying to do the same thing, it becomes a little bit easier to live that way. Now, not that we've got it all figured out, ought not that because you show up here on a Sunday or even if you're a part of it was a small group. It's not that people have it all figured out, but it's there. We're all striving for the same thing. We're all working towards the same goal. We may not all be cheering for the same sports team, but we're all trying to follow after Jesus. It is easier to live in the light when we have other people with us on the journey, but how do we do that? How do we step into that and what does that journey look like over our life? I want you to picture in your head a big spotlight and imagine that it shining down and there's a circle on the floor and and you're right on the edge of it and there's dark, nothing on the outside and then there's kind of a threshold of of light and then the light gets brighter as the center of the spotlight. You have to get that picture in your head.

Yeah.

Part of what we understand our lives and part of what's true for us as human beings is that oftentimes we find ourselves living in darkness, that we're in the dark at times when we don't pay attention to the needs of other people who were in the dark, when we only pay attention to ourselves. We're in the dark when we say things and do things that hurt other people. Part of our human condition is that when left to ourselves, we, we sometimes would rather live in darkness and, and this is part of who we are as human beings, but our invitation is to step into the light and we believe that it's united methodist. Christian is that even when we're in the dark, even when we seem to, um, that's all that we can see. And when even our insides might be filled with darkness, even in those times and those places, God's love is reaching out to us. God is present in those places as well. It may not be bright, but God's light is there. God's love is calling us to step into the light. And the invitation for God's love is for all people.

Of course, each one of us can choose whether to step into the night or not. God is calling us to come up to the edge of that lighter and then to step into the light. And when we say yes, I want to follow after Jesus, you might imagine just stepping into that, circle, that pool of blood on the floor, and it begins to to cover your toes and then begins to cover your whole body as you move into the light to say yes, I wanna follow you. It's a response and it's made possible. By God's grace, we have the chance to respond to God's love and God's desire to draw us into the light. But we have to be true about ourselves. That we make mistakes. We have sin in our lives from John Chapter one, verse eight, nine. If we claim we don't have any sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us, but if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from everything that we've done wrong. When we recognized that we make mistakes, we can step into the light and we can begin to have the darkness pushed back, begin to have our lives washed, clean, and made new,

and for some of you, you remember moment in your life where you said, yes, I want to follow after Jesus. My life is different now because of that, and for some of you you may say, you know, I don't really remember that moment, but I was maybe born in that way and I've found myself somehow living more and more into the light. Or maybe you've never said, hey, I want to follow Jesus, but you are maybe curious about what that might be like. It'd be a brought you here this morning, the journey of, of living in a life with God. A one of living in the light is not just stepping into that circle. It's not just being in the light instead of the dark. It's also continuing to grow. In the light of God's grace enables us to live in the light throughout our lives, but it's also to continue to step into the very center.

Now, if you picture that a spotlight on the floor, as you get to the center, the light grows more intense. You're clearly on in the light when you're on the edge, but as you move towards the center, it gets brighter and cleaner and more pure somehow, and you're further away from the darkness. This is part of our journey as Christians, that we might continue to grow in love of God and neighbor, that we might not just be satisfied to be in the line, but that we might continue to grow deeper. Jesus describes what that center, that most, uh, that brightest light is when he says these words in matthew 22, beginning with verse 34, when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had left the sadducees, speechless, they met together. One of them illegal, expert tested him. Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the law? He replied, you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being and with all your mind.

This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it. You must love your neighbor as you love yourself. All the law. And the prophets depend on these two commands. This is what living in the light is all about. Loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves. It's about stepping into the light saying, yes, I want to follow after Jesus, but then it's also continuing to grow closer to the center, become brighter and more intense, more pure, closer to God and closer to our neighbors. Even people that don't look like us or or live in the same houses or dress the same way as we do. This is our journey as Christians is part of what it means to live in the light. It's easier when we do this together. Our journey is following after Jesus. This is one of living in the light and continuing to grow deeper, more brightly into the light that shines.

But the thing about being in the life to following Jesus is that we always have a choice. We always have the choice before us. It should choose light or to choose darkness. You might think of a one decision to say, yes, I want to follow God, or yes, I'd like to be more like Jesus, but we have questions like that every day. Am I going to choose do this or am I going to choose to do that when I'm so angry I can't help but say anything? Am I going to say it or am I going to keep myself quiet? Going to choose to help someone else or to just pretend that I don't see them every day. We have choices in our lives. Even today, you have choices between light and dark and they're not always so stark. It's not always, uh, find, uh, a clear dividing line between this is a choice that leads you closer to the light and this is a choice that leads you more into the dark. Sometimes it's, it's shadowy and it's uncertain and we're not sure whether this choice will lead us closer to God or are further away from God, but oftentimes we do know it's all. My encouragement for you is to make choices that help you live in the light, that push back the darkness in your lives and in the lives around you, and the good news for us today is that we don't have to do that on our own because God's love calls us. The good news of Jesus Christ is that God offers a strength and power and energy to live in the light. God desires to push back the darkness in our lives and all we have to do is to open ourselves and say, yes, God can fill me with your light. Helped me to share it with others. Then I might follow you all my days.

This is our call as Christians to live in the light of Christ. Just share that light with others. And so as we close out this series today, I'm just going to invite you to pray a prayer with me that they may feel like you're in darkness right now. Or maybe you feel like, Hey, I'm living in the light, but I want to live a little bit more fully in the light and we're just going to ask God's light to fill us and that we might shine the light for others to invite you to pray. And if you'd like to repeat after me, you can do so. If not, that's all right to just invite you to be in an attitude of prayer and we'll begin just by recognizing the darkness in our lives.

Yeah,

so God, we know that there's some darkness in us. We take a moment to name it before you.

OK?

And if you know of any places in your life where, where there is darkness, just offer it to God.

Yeah,

forgive us us. Oh God, back the dark in our lives. Thank you for your son. Jesus. Please fill me with your light so that others might see you in me. Strengthen us to share, to shine, to live in your light. In Jesus name. Amen.