

**THE PRAYER OF THE DAY** O Lord God Almighty, we once walked in darkness, but You have shown Your light on us and established Your kingdom among us through our Lord Jesus, the Christ. May we so reflect Your light that others may share in the life we now have by Your grace, and, by the forgiveness of their sins, enter into Your kingdom; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**THE EPISTLE LESSON** 1 Corinthians 1:10–18 (*Paul instructs the Church to be united in mind and thought.*)

<sup>10</sup>I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. <sup>11</sup>For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. <sup>12</sup>What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." <sup>13</sup>Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? <sup>14</sup>I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup>so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. <sup>16</sup>(I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) <sup>17</sup>For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

<sup>18</sup>For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

**THE GOSPEL LESSON** Matthew 4:12–25 (*Jesus preaches, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is near."*)

<sup>12</sup>Now when [Jesus] heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. <sup>13</sup>And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, <sup>14</sup>so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

<sup>15</sup>"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,  
the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—  
<sup>16</sup>the people dwelling in darkness  
have seen a great light,  
and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,  
on them a light has dawned."

<sup>17</sup>From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

<sup>18</sup>While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup>And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." <sup>20</sup>Immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>21</sup>And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. <sup>22</sup>Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

<sup>23</sup>And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. <sup>24</sup>So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics,

and he healed them. <sup>25</sup>And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

**THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON**      Isaiah 9:1-4

*(The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.)*

1 Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan-- **2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. 3 You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. 4** For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.

On Friday I asked my wife out to eat lunch. We were at the Inn Café when a man nodded at me. I looked closer, and I knew that man. It was Rick Allen, Bill's son. Now, we have been praying for his son Rhys, a lively young 4 year old who has a horrible form of Leukemia. Last we were praying for him he not only was undergoing another round of radiation and chemo therapy, but he had contracted pneumonia.

Being a father of 4 children myself, and loving my children dearly, when I think of Rhys' illness, the words of verse. 2 stand out. It talks of **The people walking in darkness . . . , and those living in the land of the shadow of death** . The pain and trouble of this world, as the Bible describes them are darkness. This darkness, pain, illness and death exists because of our sin.

I asked Rick how Rhys was doing. He's on my daily prayer list. Rick said, 'the pneumonia is gone. Rhys is done with that last round of therapy, and only has one round of chemo-therapy left. We're just about to the end.' I trust that recovering from the pneumonia is an answer to prayer from the Lord. The end of the second round of therapy, is an answer to prayer from the Lord. Look at the rest of that verse, today's Old Testament Lesson, is, **2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.** My Christian friends, God brings light to our dark world, especially in Jesus Christ.

Yesterday we had a memorial service for Chris Rogers. Chris was the fiancee of, Lenny Moren, who is the daughter of member, Harriet Hanson. Lenny attends St. John, and Chris had been here with Lenny for our 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. From all I have heard Chris was a man of faith and integrity, a man who could fix anything, and helped others as much as he could. But on December 2 Chris' son, Erin, attacked him with a machete, killing Chris. Then his son, went and attacked others. What a waste, what a loss. What a horrible crime. Does our verse sound appropriate? **2 The people walking in darkness . . . those living in the land of the shadow of death** .

Let me tell you, however, Chris was a man of faith. he owned Bible upon Bible upon Bible, and he read them. Chris trusted in Jesus and yesterday we heard, '**My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me, and no one can snatch them out of my hand. And I give them eternal life.**' Chris may have lost his earthly life, but today he has eternal life with God in heaven, because Jesus the Good Shepherd laid down His life for His sheep, and for Chris. Jesus has taken away our sins, and rose to give us eternal life. **2 The people walking in darkness HAVE SEEN A GREAT LIGHT; on those living in the land of the shadow of death A LIGHT HAS DAWNED.**

Thursday night I heard that member Frances Barnhardt was in the hospital, so Friday I went to see her. She said the doctor had diagnosed her with cancer in the bones and in her chest. She said she had about a year to live. It sounds like '**The people walking in darkness . . . those living in the land of the shadow of death**'. Then, last night I got a call from Phyllis Williams. Frances died Friday night.

But, I had visited Frances Friday evening. In fact, she knew me, we talked, and I read to her from Romans 8 that **nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus**, and I gave her communion. In the bread and wine Jesus gave Frances forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. **2**

**The people walking in darkness have seen A GREAT LIGHT; on those living in the land of the shadow of death A LIGHT HAS DAWNED.**

We all have our sorrows, our pain, our suffering. There are sins we regret, and griefs we carry. If we could overcome our problems all by ourselves we would have lots of hope. But, many times our problems are bigger than we are. We are like **people walking in darkness . . . those living in the land of the shadow of death**

But God sent Jesus into the world. The light of the world came to the darkness that we face. He not only faced the darkness, he faced the cause of the darkness. Jesus suffered and died for our sin, and He rose again from the dead. I have heard it said, very truly, that while many problems are bigger than our ability to deal with them, there is no problem that is bigger than the love of God in Jesus, who left heaven, came to this world, and overcame sin and death. **2 The people walking in darkness have seen A GREAT LIGHT; on those living in the land of the shadow of death A LIGHT HAS DAWNED.**

May you know the Love of Jesus, who suffered and died and rose for you. In this world of darkness, may you walk in the light of Jesus. Amen.