Week 3 Belong to the Light – Ephesians 5:8-14

‘In the past you were full of darkness, but now you are full of light in the Lord. So live like children who belong to the light.’
Ephesians 5:8 (ERV)

## Introduction

Advent is a time of movement. During the weeks leading up to Christmas, we are living in the journey from darkness into light. There was a time when we did not know what it meant to follow Jesus. Maybe that’s a place where you are now. Sometimes we know we are living in darkness – we can recognise that something is missing, that the colour has been drained from life. Sometimes we don’t even know that we are in darkness.

The philosopher Plato told a story about people living in darkness. Three men sat in a cave. The only light came from a fire behind them, although they didn’t know the fire was there. They sat, looking at the wall of the cave, never turning around. They barely knew that they were in a cave at all. All they knew was the shadows cast against the wall by the fire flickering behind them. That was their life, their entire world, and they thought they were happy.

Then one day the wind blew down into the cave from the world above and tickled the neck of one of the men. He stood up, dust and cobwebs falling away from him, and turned around. He saw the fire and the light almost blinded him. He stood there, thinking that this was now the entire world – the fire and the cave. He thought he was happy. Then he felt the wind and saw a faint light in the distance. He walked out of the cave, up a tunnel, and stepped out into the blazing light of the sun.

It blinded him to begin with, but slowly his eyes adjusted. He saw green trees, grey mountains and the big blue sky. He turned around and rushed back down into the cave to tell his friends about it, but they laughed at him. They believed that the shadows on the wall was the only world that existed. The other man must have been dreaming. At first the man who had been outside kept on arguing, but the longer he was down in the cave the more distant the sunlight became, until eventually he was convinced he had been dreaming and sat back down to look at the shadows, and he knew he was sad.

Then the wind blew again. The second man felt it this time. He stood up and saw the fire. He felt the wind and saw the light and walked up into the daylight. He wept when he saw everything and rushed back into the cave to tell his friends. But they both rejected him. They said he was dreaming, just like the first one had been. The man promised them he wasn’t. He dug out the mouth of the cave until more wind started to blow into the cave. The two other men grabbed him, wrestled him to the floor, and killed him.

Then they sat back down, watched the shadows flickering on the wall, and thought they were happy, although they knew they were sad.

We are people who have seen the light and know that the world is bigger than we imagined. Now we must learn how to live according to that light, as children of that light.

## Main Body

* We cannot grow if we do not know where we start from. We used to walk in darkness. All of us. We all come from a place where we have done things we are not proud of, things we regret and wish had been different. But we don’t need to let that hold us back. We don’t need to hang on to that stuff any more. All of us have this experience and all of us need to let it go and give it over to God. We are living in the light; we need to stop hanging on to the dark.
* What does it mean to live like a child of light? It means starting from the beginning again. We are children of light; the light is our parent. We are born again of that light. We belong to the light and the light forms who we are. This means we can be confident in who we are. Those things which hold us back we can just throw away, because we have been born by this light and the shadows of our past cannot survive that light.
* As children of the light, we are not expected to stay childish. We need to grow into adults who belong to that light. We need to take responsibility not only for ourselves, which is the childish way, but also for each other, which is the adult way. As we learn to live in the light of God, we learn to love one another and serve one another. When we do these things, we are shining that light out into the world. Then, when we are showing the light of Christ, we will feel the joy of a life filled with love.

## Response

* Write on a small piece of paper words describing the shadows in your past that you’re still carrying. Be honest about it. Light a candle and then burn that paper in the light. Let the flame burn up the shadows in your life, and offer them to Jesus, knowing that just as the candle flame burns up the paper, so the flame of the Holy Spirit will burn away the shadows in your life.
* Write down, or draw, five things that you want to do which would help you grow as a child of light. What can you do to live according to the light? Where do you need to grow your discipleship? Are there areas of your faith you need to give some attention to?
* Light is always brightest when it joined by others. How you can you work with others in the church to shine your light together? As children of the light, we are all siblings and need to work together. Perhaps start by agreeing to meet with a couple of others to pray together every week of January.