

The 4th Sunday of Lent
Faith/Light vs. Unbelief/Darkness
By Paul Turner

I don't know if I'll ever be able to play the 24 Preludes for piano by Frederic Chopin. I've tried working them up twice now. And I've abandoned the project both times.

They're hard. Well, not all of them. Some of them are rather simple – like the ones in E minor and A major. If I played one of those two for you, you'd go, "Oh, yeah. I've heard that before." Even if you're an intermediate student, you can play the E minor and A major preludes. They lull you into thinking that if you can play them, certainly you can play the other 22.

Well, you can't. Or at least I can't. Some are devilishly tricky and meant to move like lightning. For a while, I felt like I was hurting my arm trying to play these things. But I couldn't stop. They were too lovely to let go. Finally, I did let go, and went back to more reachable goals of a suite by Grieg.

And then I ran into an old friend who now plays classical piano professionally. We launched into a lively discussion about music, spirituality and practice. "I'm so glad you're working on the Chopin preludes," he said. I moaned, "I'll never learn them." He said, "You probably can."

He then gave me a verbal piano lesson. (There wasn't a piano in the room where we met.) He talked about the importance of relaxing the arms, and playing Chopin very, very lightly. He said to practice difficult passages slowly. And then play them even more slowly. I thought he was going to say, practice them slowly and then play them more rapidly. No. He said practice them slowly and then more slowly. Then let them go. "Sleep on it. When you come back to it the next day, it'll be better."

He was right. This conversation was like light in the darkness for me. I still can't play all 24 preludes, but at least I have a new practice technique to try. Who knows? Maybe the third time will be the charm.

If you're ever going to move from darkness to light, you have to be willing to take criticism. It goes easier if the criticism comes from someone you respect.

This Sunday's second reading (Ephesians 5:8-14) praises the Gentile community for moving from darkness to light. Most of the bible looks askance on the Gentiles. They come into favor in the New Testament, though – if they have forsaken their false gods and placed their faith in Christ.

Ephesians says to the Gentile Christians, "You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." Not even, "You were once *in* darkness." It says "You *were* darkness." Now the light of Christ has shined upon them, and they have believed, so they are "light

in the Lord.” The letter challenges them: “Live as children of light. . . . Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness.”

For your run-of-the-mill Gentile Christian, this meant turning away from false gods and accepting the divinity of Christ.

We hear this passage on the Fourth Sunday of Lent this year because the gospel has to do with light. Jesus gives sight to a man blind from birth. On this weekend, the elect undergo the second scrutiny in preparation for their baptism. We pray that they will turn from their former ways to a life centered on Jesus. From darkness to light.

The elect are open to this because the light is coming from someone they have come to respect: Jesus himself.

Throughout Lent, we accept acts of penitence with the same goal: to turn from sin to grace, from darkness to light. Each one of us, each year, is called to accept the scrutiny of this season. We have been living in the darkness of sin. If we stay in it long enough, darkness gets pretty comfortable. Only with difficulty will we accept the light. Only with humility about ourselves and trust in the One who is Light will we forsake our sin and choose a new path.

Sometimes the road from sin to grace is hard. It seems like we’ll never be able to get there. But with the right advisor, the right conversation, the right light, it is possible to leave darkness behind. The readings this Sunday reintroduce us to Christ, who gives sight to the blind, and who makes all things visible. If we are open to him, Christ will give us light.