

Life Sunday 2025

1 Corinthians 12:1-11 "Life Shines in Darkness"

Rev. Michael W. Salemink, Executive Director, Lutherans For Life
lutheransforlife.org

The lights are flickering in Corinth.

The lights are going out in Corinth.

Something celestial's transpiring, not like a holiday but more like a hurricane.

Oh, the locale resembles your typical town in any given civilization.

But these folks have taken out their flood lights, each one.

They've turned their lives and relationships to flamethrowers and lasers trained on each other.

It could have dazzled, spectacular like sundowns and daybreaks.

Maybe once upon a time they made the city skyline sparkle.

But the natives have long since left that behind.

They take to blinding instead of brightening.

They've taken to hiding rather than enhancing one another.

Personalities that could really glow prefer brandishing their tasks and interactions to outshine the next one or wielding their physiques and remarks to overshadow their neighbors.

Spiritual gifts serve as the arena right now, but they've made stadiums out of courtroom proceedings and bedroom dealings before.

They've jostled about on stages such as fashion practices and dinner menus.

That guy's aiming red-hot shades of anger and lust someone's way.

This gal's focusing electric green streaks of envy and disgust several directions.

The atmosphere everywhere in between is crackling with crossfired ice-blue shafts of depression and neglect.

The Corinthians, the Christian Corinthians, they behold their neighbors as rivals and adversaries.

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They regard each other as opponents and even enemies.

And no one’s going to stop until he or she dominates the spotlight, captures the whole galaxy in his gravity, and has the entire universe revolving around her.

Of course, we can understand.

You can relate, can’t you?

You’ve read this script and the costumes fit.

You remember how it happens because you’ve experienced it yourself.

As far back as you can reckon, a dark one—a shadow—has lurked just outside your sight.

All along a bleak one—a spectre—has been slinking and stalking and sidling up almost unnoticed.

Oh yes, the spirit has its realm, and nearer than any would like to believe.

He suggests every light must have its nighttime to shine in.

He insists a hero needs a villain, and we learned to like the lie.

He painted a horizon in our hearts, a border and boundary.

He pointed us toward it, a perimeter and limitation.

“Your light has a source,” he whispers, “and therefore a stop.”

“Your light comes from an origin, and so it comes with an ending.”

It tempts us just enough to perceive others as threats instead of blessings.

Trust nothing from anyone other than self, and make sure you’re standing last.

So we compete.

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If you don't rise above as the better, then you will lie below at the bottom.

We use our intellect and emotions, we employ our positions and possessions, we exploit our statements and relationships no longer to illuminate but to incinerate.

Disregard the embryo.

Dispense with the elderly.

Only certain sizes, skills, and circumstances matter.

Dispatch the immigrant and the incurable.

Only sufficient ages, appearances, and abilities like mine qualify.

Dispose of the weak and the sick and the broke.

Let your light brand and amputate.

Shed red blood if you must.

Spew green bile while you can.

Glare and huff blue as steel at whomever you will.

You know they're just trying to siphon your own fragile glimmer.

And you cannot glisten until you eclipse and obscure all of theirs.

The phantom did get one thing correct.

This little light of ours is dying out.

Something is going to gradually engulf it.

The great danger does not loom outside, though.

You recall flames that blaze so intensely consume themselves.

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Suns that gather such excessive luster collapse into black holes, where no one escapes, and nothing survives.

And from this destructive orbit we have not deviated in twenty centuries since Corinth, nor even in thousands of winters after Eden.

Samson's might brings Samson's demise.

You can scorch away but only by searing yourself as well.

For the wages of sin is death, and then hell takes custody forever.

And yet, that horizon holds more than horror.

That horizon that frightens can also excite.

The horizon harbors a hope.

Yes, you live within a perimeter and limit.

Yes, we each reach our border and boundary.

In fact, it implies not only an ending but also an arriving.

That Source of yours contoured and configured you less for a stopping point and more for a settling place.

Somebody Other than self meant us here, intended and designed us for fellowship, made and created humankind for community.

Involved, attached, entangled even—in a word, alive.

The Someone Else who occupies the unseen realm also bleeds over the margins and bridges our edges.

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Light of Light has invaded.

The Further Figure from whom we come and to whom we may cling has entered the Corinthian conflicts and our contemporary contexts.

Not for no reason does He make Himself known as Son of God.

They call Him "Christ," and that stands for chosen, because He is collecting all our reds and greens and blues.

He embodies God's own rainbow abundance.

They name Him "Jesus," and it translates to Savior, because He counteracts our competing.

He kindles embers instead of extinguishing them.

This Lord emanates humility rather than hubris.

This Lord Jesus preserves and prolongs, enriches and amplifies, He reconciles and integrates.

This Lord and Savior Jesus Christ attracts, ingests, and exhausts all the radiation we can emit.

He does it to draw near and dwell with so that none need endure alone.

His love hurtles Him headlong into the black hole of death.

Christ Jesus substitutes there in our place, suffers the guilt and undergoes the punishment to atone and amend for your sinfulness and mine, and his and hers and theirs.

And His grace confines and silences the dark and bleak one, establishes not just truce but peace, relief, healing, triumph, delight.

Christ Jesus compresses it into a resurrection supernova, for light can burn out but also bring forth.

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Life and immortality He has brought to light, blue as bubbling water, green as growing stalks,
red as throbbing lifeblood.

His forgiveness, God's forgiveness for you, it focuses a refining fire pure whitewashing out all
the wickedness and wrongs.

In Him is life, and His life is the light of all humankind.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not—no, does not, will not, and cannot—
overcome it.

One light need not supplant another.

Each may instead supplement, stars mushrooming the magnitude together in the galactic gravity
of Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

Unconditional acceptance has freed us from competing for receiving, appreciating, entrusting.

An array of hues, a multitude of tones reflect and express one Spirit, one source and origin Lord,
and the mosaic variety yields masterpiece out of what feels like mess.

No more do neighbor and embryo, elderly and immigrant, sick, weak, and broke endanger; they
enrich.

Each adds celebration and only subtracts selfishness, expanding into and retaking territory from
the shadows.

Every next need invites embracing to replace elbowing, where one and all become gift and
privilege and special and precious.

Let your life shine, then.

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Do not fear it intersecting a brother's beams or sister's streams.

Do not be afraid should it even encounter darkness itself.

Neither surprise pregnancy nor terminal diagnosis nor personal choice, public opinion, and political controversy will dampen it.

Lord God alongside you with love and abundance never comes up short of forgiveness for the past, salvation for the future, and protecting in the present.

Drink deeply this sweet and warm Gospel until it burns within you.

Listen long and often to its comforting frequencies.

Bathe heart, body, and life completely in its clean veils.

Speak God's truth. Show Christ's love. Share life with courage and compassion.

He that sustained the Corinthian experiment until we could take part shall not ever run out of the room that life opens up. Amen.