

The Wired Word
Sunday, September 11 at 9:15am

Student Copy

Dear Class Member,

In Minnesota this week, the remains of an 11-year-old boy, Jacob Wetterling, abducted in 1989, were found after a longtime suspect in the case led authorities to the location where the boy was buried. The news led family, friends, neighbors and thousands of people across the state and elsewhere in the nation to leave their porch lights on over the Labor Day weekend in memory of Jacob and to support his family. It also connects with what Jacob's family called the light of hope that has been burning in their hearts for him for the 27 years since he was taken from them.

"Light" is imagery that readers of the Bible understand, for there, it symbolizes good deeds, hope, the opening of one's heart and mind to the call of God, and even Christ himself. So this news is a good time for us to affirm our confidence that the worst evil human beings do cannot extinguish the light of God. That will be the topic of our next class.

If you wish to start thinking about our topic in advance, below is some introductory material.

The Wired Word invites us to contribute news story suggestions for upcoming lessons. If you have a story you'd like to suggest, post it to *The Wired Word* forum at <http://thewiredword.squarespace.com/>.

The Wired Word Class - Sundays at 9:15am - The Miller Fellowship Hall

This Sunday, September 11 - ***Special Guest Speaker*** during the **10:25am worship service** and prayers of remembrance and peace

Next Sunday, September 18 - Rally Day & Ketchup Sunday

9:15am Sunday School

10:25am Worship - Puppet Show

Lucerne after Worship

6:00pm Confirmation Class

Sunday, September 25

9:15am Sunday School

10:25am Worship

12:30pm Combined Youth Group Meeting

The Wired WORD

**'Jacob's Hope': Porch Lights Burn All Weekend in Memory of
Minnesota Boy Abducted in 1989; Remains Just Found**

The Wired Word for the Week of September 11, 2016

In the News

Thousands of people across Minnesota and elsewhere in the nation left their porch lights burning throughout the Labor Day weekend in response to the news that the remains of Jacob Wetterling had been found. Wetterling

was 11 years old when he was snatched by a masked abductor from a country road not far from his home in St. Joseph, Minnesota, on October 22, 1989.

"Our hearts are broken," Jacob's mother Patty Wetterling said in response to the news. "We have no words."

On Sunday evening, October 22, 1989, Jacob, his younger brother Trevor, age 10, and a friend, 11-year-old Aaron Larson, were cycling home from a store where they had gone to rent a video, when a masked gunman stopped them, ordered them to throw their bikes into a ditch and lie face down on the ground. He eventually released Trevor and Aaron, telling them to run toward a nearby wooded area and not look back or they would be shot. This was the last time Jacob was ever seen.

Over the years, on the anniversary of his disappearance, many people left their porch lights on in a show of support for his family. This Labor Day weekend, thousands of porch lights have been left on once again.

When the news broke that Jacob's remains had been found, someone started a Facebook event called "Lights on for Jacob Wetterling," and soon 15,000 people had pledged to participate. Many posted pictures of their lit porch lights. Minnesota state Rep. Peggy Flanagan tweeted a picture and wrote, "Almost every light on my street is on tonight. We are Jacob's hope."

Jacob's mother responded via Twitter, saying, "Our family is drawing strength from all your love & support. We're struggling for words at this time. Thank you for your hope."

Jacob's abduction caused an extended investigation, with some 50,000 leads pursued. It also led to the establishment of a national sex offender registry in 1994.

Authorities were led to the location of the body by Danny Heinrich, 53, who was long a suspect in the case. He was in federal custody on child pornography charges and reportedly, some deal on those charges required him to reveal the location of Jacob's body. On Tuesday, Heinrich admitted in federal court to abducting, sexually abusing and killing Jacob.

TWW editorial team member Micah Holland, who is about the same age as Jacob would be and was raised in Minnesota, remembers how the news of Jacob's disappearance changed his childhood.

"Before his abduction, I was able to ride my bike all over the place and would not come home until the street lights would come on," Holland said. "My brother and I had a ton of freedom."

But after Jacob's abduction, said Holland, things changed. "We began having to check in with my folks, allowing them to know where we were at all times. We had many conversations about interacting with strangers, and there was just a different feel about leaving the house. Friends of mine would share the same mindset. I am not sure about the rest of the country, but his abduction changed much in Minnesota. We were less free, but more safe."

In 1990, Jacob's parents founded an advocacy group dedicated to child safety, now known as the Jacob Wetterling Resource Center. A statement on the center's website, posted after the news of the finding of Jacob's remains broke, reads:

We are in deep grief. We didn't want Jacob's story to end this way. In this moment of pain and shock, we go back to the beginning. The Wetterlings had a choice to walk into bitterness and anger or to walk into a light of what could be, a light of hope. Their choice changed the world.

This light has been burning for close to 27 years. The spark began in the moments after the abduction of Jacob Wetterling, when his family decided that light is stronger than darkness. They lit the flame that became Jacob's Hope. All of Central Minnesota flocked to and fanned the flame, hoping for answers. The light spread statewide, nationally and globally as hearts connected to the 11-year-old boy who liked to

play goalie for his hockey team, wanted to be a football player, played the trombone, and loved the times he spent with his sisters, brother and parents.

Today, we gather around the same flame. The flame that has become more than the hope for one as it led the way home for thousands of others. It's the light that illuminates a world that Jacob believed in, where things are fair and just.

Our hearts are heavy, but we are being held up by all of the people who have been a part of making Jacob's Hope a light that will never be extinguished. It shines on in a different way. We are, and we will continue to be, Jacob's Hope.

Jacob, you are loved.

In 2010, the Jacob Wetterling Resource Center merged with the National Child Protection Training Center. According to their joint website, "The move is an effort to combine the groups' resources and strengthen their common efforts to ensure every child grows up in a healthy, safe world free from abuse, exploitation and abduction."

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Jacob Wetterling's Remains Found on Paynesville-Area Farm. *Star Tribune*](#)

[Jacob Wetterling: Lights Left on in Memory of Boy Who Was Abducted. *CNN*](#)

[Jacob Wetterling Resource Center](#)

[Confession in Boy's Death Solves Case That Haunted Minnesota *AP*](#)

The Big Questions

Here are some of the questions we will discuss in class:

1. When used metaphorically, light and darkness often contrast good and evil. We live in a world where darkness has not been able to extinguish light, but neither has light been able to expel darkness. What, if anything, makes you believe that light will win?
2. What does it mean that God is light? What does it mean to walk in the light?
3. How is "light" related to "hope"?
4. What, if anything, do you personally do to fight darkness?
5. What deliberate measures does your church take to ensure that all children in its ministries are safe without stifling their learning and development? What are some of the discussions your congregation has had with parents on this topic?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

We will look at selected verses from these Scripture texts. You may wish to read these in advance for background:

John 8:12-20

Matthew 5:14-16

John 1:1-14

Ephesians 4:17-24

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

In class, we will talk about these passages and look for some insight into the big questions, as well as talk about other questions you may have about this topic. Please join us.

Copyright 2016 Communication Resources