

Sermon: Walk as Children of Light

(Preached by the Rev. Paul Wu, at St. Giles, Ottawa, on March 15, 2026. This sermon is inspired by the article '*AI and the Common Good?*', written by Katharine Sisk of the Justice Ministries of the PCC, published in the Spring 2026 issue of the Presbyterian Connection.)

On February 10, 2026, tragedy struck Tumbler Ridge, a small mining town in the northeastern corner of British Columbia. A mass shooting event occurred in Tumbler Ridge Secondary School, where six people were killed and twenty seven others injured, mostly 12 and 13 year-olds.

The shooter, Jesse Rootselaar (also known as Jesse Strange) was a former student of the school. Prior to committing those horrific acts, evidently she had also shot and killed her mother and half-brother at their home.

This incident was the deadliest school shooting in Canada since the Ecole Polytechnique massacre in 1989, and the deadliest mass shooting in Canada since the Nova Scotia attacks in 2020. Since the shooter had turned the gun on herself when confronted by the police, we may never know why she did what she did.

Initial news reports speculated on her mental health, sexual identity, drug use, and questions about where she acquired the guns she used. Later, it was revealed that she had in-depth interaction with Artificial Intelligence, namely ChatGPT, where her account was flagged by the company, and subsequently banned. The nature of those interactions was unclear, and the company was particularly reluctant to disclose why it banned her account, and why it did not forward their concern to the proper authority.

The Canadian government's Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation had met the founder of ChatGPT, and gotten assurance that the company will try to do better the next time, but was no closer in answering the question that I and I think many others had in mind: What role did AI play in this horrendous attack in Tumbler Ridge? After all, ChatGPT has being suggested and even marketed as a viable substitute for mental-health counselling. How could the public be assured that AI is not actually endangering the minds of the impressionable?

Brother and sisters in Christ, on this fourth Sunday of Lent, where repentance is the central theme, we come to these words of Apostle Paul, in Ephesians 5:6-7,

*“Let no one deceive you with empty words,
for because of these things the wrath of God comes
on those who are disobedient.
Therefore do not be associated with them,
for once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light.”*

The contrast between darkness and light is paramount, as Paul reminds his readers of what they once were. Not only did they live in darkness: they were darkness (4:18). But now they have been redeemed from the dominion of darkness and inherit the kingdom of light (as in Colossians 1:12-13). They not only live in the light: they are light. This is only possible when believers are in union with the Lord of light, that is Christ Jesus, who is the light of all people, that shines in darkness, and the darkness could not overtake it. (John 1:4-5)

Artificial Intelligence has exploded onto humanity with wide-ranging implications for the human society. Most of us have used AI in one form or another; even basic internet searches now use the technology. The latest form of generative AI, called Large Language Models is what powers apps like ChatGPT, Gemini, Microsoft Copilot and DeepSeek (the Chinese equivalent). These are powerful tools capable to produce text, images, videos in conversations with human beings. They are able to absorb vast quantities of data and produce meaningful analysis, almost instantly.

Some fear AI would soon be able to write complex software codes, thus making itself even more intelligent and more capable. Even when AI is being used in seemingly benign and helpful ways, there are still ethical dimensions that we should not overlook. Allow me to list three broad categories:

- 1) What is AI doing to cognitive abilities of the younger generation, when answers to almost any question can be instantaneously provided? Would AI improve or diminish a child’s development in critical thinking, in sound judgement? Would it facilitate quality research, or produce faulty ones? What happens when humanity stop thinking for themselves? What happens when we stop reading for the pleasure of reading? I know I am

throwing out a lot of questions with few answers, but bear with me for a little bit more.

2) What is AI doing to our environment when its data centres are already consuming vast quantities of power and water? A 2024 report from Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory notes that AI data centres were responsible for 4.4% of all energy used in the United States, and projects to double that usage in 2028. Given the heavy environmental footprint of AI, and the amount of money across the globe that are pouring into data centres, including here in Canada, serious questions need to be raised on the impact AI has on climate crisis, on environmental degradation. What happens when AI competes with humanity's need for energy and water? Would we get squeezed out, hung out to dry, metaphorically and literally?

3) What would become of the labour force replaced inevitably by AI? CEO of both Microsoft AI and Anthropic have recently predicted AI achieving human-level performance on professional tasks within 18 months to two years. This would mean in the near-term, a serious disruption of all entry-level white-collar, knowledge-based jobs. The segment that seems to be most at risk are the young people currently entering into the workforce on 'stepping-stone' jobs.

In fact, Block (formerly Square) had recently laid off 4,000 workers—nearly 40% of its staff—citing that AI tools allow a smaller team to be more productive, arguing they are simply getting ahead of the AI lay-off curve. As ludicrous as this company sounds, it is not alone.

Given the multitude ethical concerns on Artificial Intelligence, do we as Christians have a role to play? What does the Scripture say on this?

Apostle Paul reminds us to “walk as children of light, for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.” When the light of Christ shines in the lives of believers, it produces goodness, righteousness and truthfulness.

Goodness is the achievement of moral excellence combined with a generous spirit. Righteousness was understood by the Greeks as giving all their due, and it should be understood by us in relational terms—that is being right with God and with one another. Truthfulness stands for genuineness and honesty; it is not only something to be said but something to be done. A life lived in the light is found not only in all these qualities held in balance, but in every aspect of each.

The Presbyterian subordinate standard *Living Faith 2.4.1* describes us, the believers, as “not owners but stewards of God’s good earth. Concerned with the well-being of all of life we welcome the truths and insights of all human skill and science about the world and the universe.” Furthermore, it states, “We welcome scientific and technological development, but we need to set guardrails of stewardship, which calls us to love and justice in respecting God’s creation and in seeking its responsible use for the common good” (2.4.2) In short, with regard to Artificial Intelligence, AI is only good when it is brought into light and used for the common good.

The Canadian Council of Churches through its ‘Faith and Live Sciences Reference Group’ has looked into the issue of ethical uses of AI. It supports also The Rome Call of AI Ethics, issued by the Vatican Church in 2020, in consultation with a wide range of faith groups, industry, government and academic institutions.

In this ‘Call’, six principles are outlined: **Transparency** (AI systems must be understandable to all); **Inclusion** (AI systems must not discriminate against anyone because every human being has equal dignity); **Accountability** (there must always be someone who takes responsibility for what a machine does); **Impartiality** (AI system must not follow or create biases); **Reliability** (AI must be reliable with minimum hallucination); **Security and Privacy** (AI system must be secure and respect the privacy of users).

It’s a good list for the goal of good stewardship for the common good. Allow me to add to the list another principle, as originally proposed by Isaac Asimov, the first of three Laws of Robotics (slightly rephrased): Artificial Intelligence may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.

Such ‘do no harm’ principle would certainly have prevented the tragedy in Tumbler Ridge, and is imbedded in Paul’s call for us to ‘walk as children of light’. Perhaps, and it is not completely out of the question, we as humanity may need to teach that to the AI, not only for the common good, but for our collective survival in the world that God has created.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**