

Christ Will Shine on You

Grace and Peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The good news for today is taken from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 5:8-14:

⁸ *For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light –*
⁹ *for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.* ¹⁰ *Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord.* ¹¹ *Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.* ¹² *For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly;* ¹³ *but everything exposed by the light becomes visible,* ¹⁴ *for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."*

Dear congregation!

There are two ways of looking at life: One way is to focus on the dark side and the other is to focus on the bright side of life. ... That almost sounds like the words of a pop song! But what is the dark side of life? That is life full of terror and violence, injustice and squalor, pain and tragedy and death. ... We just need to look at what has happened in the past weeks / months in PE, SA and the world. We are confronted with real-life problems, with tears and loss. And we find ourselves asking 'why?' Why does someone we love have to suffer so much? Why is someone we love taken away from us so suddenly? Why is there violence and death in our lives? ... We are focusing on the darkness in our lives, darkness that frightens us, yes, even terrifies us.

But there is another way of looking at the world. There we see the dark side of life, we see the pain and suffering, but are, with the help of God, able to see behind and through the pain. If we take Easter as the starting point, when God gave his only Son to die for our sins out of pure love and a desire for us, his children, to live, and then with the knowledge of the resurrection of the tortured, lifeless body of Christ, we can know that God

is love, that the darkness of Good Friday can and has turned into the light of the resurrection on Easter Sunday. We human beings want to keep alive those whom we love. We do not want to let our family and friends die, but when they do, they live on in our memory and in our hearts long after we have stopped seeing them. Hope in Christ and Joy in the knowledge of God's caring love then flows like glowing lava underneath the black, dark and hard crust of life.

Is this perhaps what happened to the disciples as they sat in locked rooms discussing the incomprehensible events of the transition from disaster on Good Friday to the wonder of Easter Sunday? In one sense nothing had changed: Rome still occupied Palestine, religious authorities still wanted their heads, death and evil still reigned outside. Gradually, however, the shock of their perceived loss on Good Friday gave way to a long slow undertow of hope and joy. God will not let death win...

That is the great and magnificent Light that came into the world and into our lives, dear congregation! It is the Light of Life and of Hope in the Risen Lord! That is what we celebrate today and in fact every Sunday! Christ is risen! Christ conquered death and brought us the Light of Life! And here in Ephesians it is said of **us**: You are now light in the Lord, in union with Him who is the Light of the world. In union with His death and resurrection.

Christ's light was instilled in us in our baptism, when we received His light in the sign of the sacrament. In baptism something amazing happens: God calls us: ***"Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you!"*** In baptism the grave darkness of death is overcome by God's call into the light of life. With our baptism we are connected to the godly Light. We are made children of the Light.

In baptism the gracious **call** from the darkness of death into the light of life **comes from God**. Belonging to Christ is a promise of light and salvation, salvation from the darkness of death and our human darkness and all that this darkness threatens us with.

In the supreme sense **Christ is the Light of the world**. In a secondary sense we as Christians are the light of the world. Christ immediately, we mediately; He the original, we the derived; He the sun, we the moon **reflecting the light**. The moon is a nice metaphor for the relationship between Christ and His light and the light in us.

On many nights the sky is lit up not only with many stars but also with the **moon**. The grey and dark moon does not have light in and of itself; it is a dark and lonely planet which does not and cannot shine on its own. The moon gets its light and its radiance only from the sun. This is what is meant with the words in Ephesians: *Christ will shine on you!* The hope and the joy of His resurrection, of Life will light up our greyish-black lives, will make us rise and shine! As the moon can only shine when the sun shines its light upon it, so the Light of God's love shines upon us and we can live our lives in His light.

Christ's promise to shine on us with His light is a promise we need to remember especially in those times when we experience darkness and night. It can give us comfort and strength when darkness threatens to overpower and consume us. We all experience these dark times, when we struggle alone, when we are marked by illness, destructive relationships, by despair and personal pain, by death and grief. Our congregation has experienced numerous dark phases lately, from burglaries, physical attacks and accidents, to hospitalizations, operations and the loss of loved ones. And yet the encounters with the dark side of life belong as much to the Christian faith as does the light side. The experience of deep darkness in Christ's death on the Cross belongs to the core of Christian faith. Radical loneliness, being left alone and abandoned in

the darkest night of the soul. ... Where is comfort to be found? Not in the distractions of the flickering light screens and technological wonders of our day. Nor in isolated quotes from the Bible in the hope that they could be quick fixes and cures for deep wounds and ills. Comfort and hope are, however, found in the promise of a Light that accompanies us surely and steadily, irrespective of whether it is day or night, light or dark in and around us.

Whilst Pastor Anja was sitting at her desk writing these words, the sun was setting in the west and shone on her face. And she realized that, yes, she needs only turn her face to the light and let it shine on her. And then she might know that this Light is what gives her hope, strength and courage for the night that is coming.

Christ's Light and the fact that we belong to this Light has consequences for how we live our lives in this world. We acknowledge the dark side, but we do not focus our lives on it NOR do we allow it to determine the way we see things in life. Christ and His life, in the resurrection of Easter Sunday, dwells in us, it changes our inward nature and works not only in us, but also through us, enabling us to be a blessing for the world around us. *The fruit of the light is found in all that is good, right and true*. The letter of Ephesians reminds us that the Light is there, it is in us and around us. Therefore, as hearers of these words we should stretch ourselves out toward the Light of God, just as plants do, because without light they would die.

Christ shines on you and makes you look good and just and truthful, just as Christ makes you see how he has made others look good and just and truthful. And so, we build one another up. That is why we also need each other to be light bearers for one another, encouraging and supporting one another. When hot, burning coals are together in the fire, they glow. As soon as one coal is taken out and left on its own, it will soon go cold and lose its glow.

The message of Ephesians does not say: Lift your head, think positive, don't let yourself

go, because you ought to be a bright shining light! It much rather reminds us of something that remains unchanged on lighter days as it does on darker days. We are children of God, children of this great Light that goes up and shines over all people, that illuminates and warms everyone. Easter has happened! The hope of new life glows within us. And we are children of a God who loves us and enfolds us in his arms, whether we are near or far, light or dark. To take this reminder with us on our way can indeed throw light on everything that we may encounter: whether it is sunshine or storm, success or failure, joy or pain. We are not asked to walk around bright eyed and bushy tailed all the time, but we can simply allow the light of Christ to shine on and through us in blessing. As a plant seeks and turns to the light so do we.

Christians who have gone before us, encourage us with the good news that God's light can be found even in the darkest of places. Darkness always comes at the end of each day, it awaits us also in our deepest struggles during the dark night of the soul and the fight with death. We can however walk towards and through it in the confidence of Christ's Promise that His Light will shine on and accompany us. As pilgrims walking in the light of God we can walk with courage in the knowledge that the words of the psalmist of psalm 139 are indeed true: "Darkness is not darkness in Thee, and the night shines like the day. Darkness is as light to Thee. "So, let us take courage and rejoice in the Light of our lives and celebrate it! God will let neither darkness nor death win!"

Amen.