

Sermon Ephesians 5 8 14 4th Sunday in Lent series A

Sermon: 4th Sunday in Lent

Text: Ephesians 5:8-14 (v.8)

Theme: Darkness versus Light

Goal: To live as children of light by God's grace and strength

Dear Friends,

Introduction: We have recently experienced some power cuts in South Africa due to the heavy rain which had left coal stocks wet (and due to some other reasons as well). How did you react to the blackout? It was funny in our home, because we wanted to prepare coffee in the morning but the coffee machine was not working; the kettle was not working; the microwave was not working; the stove was not working!!! We had four options to warm up water to make our coffee, but none of them was possible to be use because of lack of power. Only then we realized how dependant we are on electricity, not just to switch on a bulb and have light, but for all the machines and equipment we have at home.

In normal times it is so easy and natural for us to switch on a light in our houses. But it was not so in Biblical times. They had only a small clay lamp (like this one that I brought from Israel) and they didn't have a match to light the wick. It was a long process to get fire and to preserve it burning. No light in the streets...nothing but darkness. A little lamp like this one seems to be insignificant nowadays; but in the darkness it makes a huge difference! – We have to have this in mind to understand better why Jesus and the apostles used the illustration of light to talk about faith and about Christian life in the midst of the darkness of this world.

Continuing the sequence of texts presented by the readings in this Lent Season, Paul moves now from the assurance of salvation by

grace by faith in Jesus to practical issues: How to live the new life. He contrasts the “before” and the “after”, the darkness and the light.

I – Darkness

Darkness is the natural way of the world. Even in the beginning it was said: “..darkness was over the surface of the deep...And God said, “Let there be light”, and there was light.” (Genesis 1:2, 3). And light is vital for the development of everything: plants, animals, human beings. The 24-hour day alternates between darkness and light time.

The natural man lives in darkness, according to the Scripture. Or, to use the Gospel for today, they are spiritually blind. Many people prefer to enjoy the night life; as someone said: At night all cats are grey... Paul refers to several “deeds of darkness” in our text and he says: “For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.” Some of the deeds of darkness mentioned by Paul are: sexual immorality, any kind of impurity, greed, obscenity, foolish talk, coarse joking... In the same context he mentions other deeds of darkness: bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, every form of malice, drunkenness, debauchery...

These are typical behaviours of people living in darkness, far from the true Light that comes from God. We shall not be surprised of what is happening around us in the darkness, because it was so in the time before the Flood, it was so in Sodom and Gomorra, it was and it is so in several flourishing civilizations of the past and of the present.

Many of the new Christians in Ephesus came from a pagan background. Therefore Paul can write them: “For you were once in darkness”, practicing all these things; “but now you are light in the Lord”. Even if we don’t come from a pagan background and didn’t

live that way in the past, but we know from the Bible that we were all born blind, like the man of the Gospel reading, and we needed the gracious touch of Jesus' hand, who washed our natural blindness in the water of the Holy Baptism, bringing us to His light!

II – Light

We are now “light in the Lord”. Therefore, “live as children of light”. Jesus is the power station that supplies us with the true light. There has never ever been a power cut, a blackout, due to lack of resources. He is the Light of the World (John 9:5), the truth which Jesus repeated several times during His ministry and which is used frequently by the apostles in their letters to the Christians.

We can walk in the light only after Jesus has brought us into His light. Before this, we were walking without a goal, like blind people in the darkness without someone to guide them. Now, that God has called us “out of darkness into His wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9), we walk looking forward where the True Light shines and illuminates our way.

As Paul had made a list of the “fruitless deeds of darkness”, now he makes a list of the “fruit of the light”: “For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth”... He adds more fruits in this context: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you... find out what pleases the Lord ...Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God our Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...”

III – Light in the darkness

Although Christians live in normal social relationship with others, as did the Lord Jesus (Lk 5:30-32); 15:1-2), they are not to participate in the sinful

lifestyle of unbelievers. (CSSB, 1810). Our light in the midst of darkness, - (sometimes we are alone with our little faith) - is threatened by dark winds which try to blow out our flame. Don't expose yourself too much to this kind of temptation and don't stay alone for a long time. Come to the fellowship to your family of light and fill your tank with the necessary oil – God's Word and the Sacrament – refill it regularly to maintain your light shining in the darkness. Some Christians say, "*My faith is strong, nothing will affect me*"... but they are not aware how dangerous it is to expose yourself to the deeds of darkness. On the other hand, we have God's promise that "a smouldering wick He will not snuff out" (Isaiah 42:3). God is gracious and He offers us conditions to maintain our light shining. We have to avoid the deeds of darkness and be always connected to the True Light, our power station, Jesus. He said: "I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness" (John 12:46).

Conclusion: At the Last Supper, when Judas was revealed as the betrayer, he went out of the upper room. And the text added: "And it was night" (John 13:30). Judas exchanged the true Light for darkness, not only outside the room, but darkness in his heart. And we know his end. The teaching and warning of Paul in our text are not in vain. Even close friends to Jesus can fall. - It was also at night that Peter denied Jesus. He was by himself among all the unbelievers and enemies of Christ; and Peter was not strong enough to resist the pressure against him. It is not easy to remain in the light, and we know by experience how many times we stumble while walking along the rough tracks of this life. But Jesus' hand is there to hold us firm and His "Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path" (Psalm 119:105). Therefore our text finishes with the warning: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Amen.