

## Walking in Light

1 John 1:1-2:2

I'm usually the last person in my house to go to bed. Some of that's because working with college students can lead to some late hours, and some of it's my natural inclination. But it means I'm often walking in the dark, trying not to wake anyone up. And while I know where most things are, neither my kids or I are as good about picking things up as we should be, so there's usually something to step on. If I was walking in the light, I could see. If I'm walking in the darkness, I can't see what's there.

In trying to avoid darkness, people instead seek for enlightenment, though they don't call it that. Our world is full of self-help books, recipes and checklists and "hacks" for getting your life together. Some can be pretty helpful. Many focus on "being yourself," which easily leads to self-preoccupation and narcissism. The mystics of Luther's day urged people to "Do what is in you!" They appealed to people's supposed "inner light" as the source of their moral power and courage. But Luther bemoaned and distrusted this piety. Before his rediscovery of the Gospel, all he could see in his heart was selfishness and sin. How could he do what was in him, when his heart was full of lust, selfishness, and pride? Rather than light, Luther saw only darkness in his sinful heart.

In today's reading from 1 John, we should start at the center: "God is light and in him there is no darkness at all." Other advice about the road to good living can be very helpful, depending on our situation. But when we recognize that we are, at the bottom line, children of the God who created us and the Christ who walks with us, all of life comes clearer.

CS Lewis once said, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it but because by it I see

everything else." The light of God helps us see everything more clearly. Not just our sin, but God's grace and forgiveness. That changes how we see everything. And when we see things properly, that changes the way we walk.

We heard as we always do the Sunday after Easter about Thomas, who was in the dark. He'd walked away from the disciples when Jesus appears to them in the upper room. There's debate over why he wasn't with the disciples when Jesus appeared to them. Some think that it was because Thomas was no longer "with" the disciples, no longer a part of the group, no longer a follower of Jesus. He was off on his own, alone, dealing with the grief and fear he had by himself. He was walking in darkness, but Jesus came to call him back into the light.

Now, this walking isn't just about a single step. It is instead ongoing, habitual activity, present continual tense. Walking in darkness isn't just a single step, but being in the dark. So, too, is walking in the light.

The sin we have, the sin we try to hide, the sin we refuse to admit even to ourselves enslaves and entraps us, and we are unable to free ourselves from sin's power. It's only out of the brokenness of recognizing our powerlessness that grace can work. It's the brokenness that comes from knowing that you can't help yourself. It's the brokenness that comes with a hangover, or the failing grade that comes as a result of too much partying and not enough studying. It's the brokenness that comes with a broken friendship, a relationship that was ended because of your own fault that can't be undone.

One of the Greek words for sin the most common one used in the New Testament is

hamartia, which means to miss the mark. The target set by God's law is something we can never hit every single time. Instead, we miss the mark. We sin. And we can't fix it on our own.

As we say at the beginning of the service when we use Divine Service Setting 1, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9). These words remind us of God's promises. When we confess our sins, God forgives us. Because of Christ's death on the cross, our sins are washed away in the blood of Jesus. Because of Christ's Word of absolution, he removes our sin from us. It's as simple—and wonderful—as that! It's not that hard! Getting right with God is as simple as saying, "I'm sorry," or "I have sinned against the Lord," and receiving His forgiveness in faith. As God's forgiven children by faith, we become more and more like him each day as we hear his Word and receive his forgiveness.

The saying goes, "Sometimes sunlight is the best disinfectant." The Washington Post adopted the slogan "Democracy dies in darkness" in 2017, when they wanted to show the power of the press to show what was happening in the federal government. Iowa and other states have so called sunshine laws, regulations requiring transparency and disclosure in government or business. Evil hides in darkness, and flees from the light.

When our sins are exposed to the light of God's Law in confession and repentance, the darkness in our hearts flees like shadows from the rising sun. Then the light of Jesus' love can come into our hearts. His grace can overcome and overpower the sin within us and washes us in light, transforming our hearts into places of light, little lamps burning with the light and

love of Jesus Christ, who is the Light of the World.

Sin thrives in darkness. When secret sin hides in the shadows, it has power over us, rotting and festering. But when you flip on the lights, the cockroaches scatter. When you confess your sin, God is faithful and just to forgive your sin (1 John 1:9). His light puts the darkness to flight and burns brightly within you. Christ's light shines in you, and you reflect his light to the world. Bring your sins to light in confession and repentance, and cling to the cross of Christ, the shining light that radiates grace and mercy to people everywhere.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in "Life Together" that we are all sinners with darkness dwelling somewhere within. Pretending we have no sin—either individually or communally—is deceptive and untruthful. Instead, Christ should be, and needs to be, the center of every worshipping community. Christ brings light to the darkness of our secrets and sins. Therefore, the more honest and open we are, the more healing can abound.

True fellowship, as 1 John tells us, begins with honesty, confession and forgiveness. The goal may not be to avoid the inevitable sins that come with communal living, but rather to avoid the big one: pretending we have no sin at all. That's why John tells us to walk in the light or walk in the darkness. The people he's writing to needed to be reminded about the difference between their faith talk and their faith walk. And so do we.

We will miss the mark. We will stumble in our walks of faith. But because of what we just celebrated, we can live and walk in hope.

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