

2 Cor. 4:6-10. Transfiguration 17.1.2016

Light illuminates darkness!

⁶ For God, who said, “Let there be light in the darkness,” has made us understand that this light is the brightness of the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

⁷ But this precious treasure - this light and power that now shine within us - is held in perishable containers, that is, in our weak bodies. So everyone can see that our glorious power is from God and is not our own.

[⁸ We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed and broken. We are perplexed, but we don't give up and quit. ⁹ We are hunted down, but God never abandons us. We get knocked down, but we get up again and keep going.] ¹⁰ Through suffering, these bodies of ours constantly share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies. [NLT]

The question of ‘what is in it for us’ if we become members of the church is nothing new. Long before the term ‘prosperity gospel’ was coined, this thinking has been present in the church.

I don't think that this idea is restricted to only those parts of the Christian Church who have unashamedly taught this - if we are honest, we too feel that our faith in Jesus Christ should have a visible reward. Being members of his church - and attending the services regularly - should lead to us having a better life. [Is there anyone here, who does not feel that way?]

Yet, I have heard of people who say, that they won't become Christians, because all the Christians they know have problems. Why should that perception be? Why does God not simply wipe away all our problems?

The only answer we seem to get to this cry is that

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Light is best visible when it is dark - that is what struck me after the attack in our home, which this week will be exactly a year ago. Let me hasten to say, that this is not something we feel when we are in the middle of our problems - then it feels that there is only darkness. It is only by looking back, that we see the light which shone, and to realise that God was with us all along.

We have heard it a few times during this past Christmas season, that Jesus came into the world to bring the light of God to people who were in darkness. God created light - and he creates light in our lives today also! It is the light which we have experienced once again - the light which shone on the shepherds out on the fields of Bethlehem.

God's light comes into the darkness of our life - to those who felt abandoned by God, or who had not known about him. And it brings light and hope to those who had lived in fear and loneliness. This light brings about change - but the change happens inside us! Paul writes here: God, who said, “Let there be light in the darkness,” has made us understand that this light is the brightness of the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

And we cry out, ‘If God has this power to call light into being, why does he not just say a word, and make our lives not look different? Why must Christians suffer? Why must we bear the mockery of those who don't believe that we need a crutch?’

These are questions for which there seems to be no answer. All we get to hear is that this light and power that now shine within us - is held in perishable containers, that is, in our weak bodies. But the Good News of Jesus Christ is, that we have his light and power within us. We may have problems, we may - in spite of our best efforts - stumble and fall into doing what we had determined that we would not do again.

In a way our lives as Christians are like those people live who attend AA meetings. When we come together here we are like somebody who needs to say: Hi, my name is Helmut, and I am a sinner. There are times when I forget that I have undertaken to live differently. Oh, and by the way, even though I know that God is always with me, there are times when fear just catches up with me. It is only when we acknowledge that we are perishable containers, that we turn to the only source of light and power over and over.

The Biblical narrative does not gloss over this. The people called to follow Jesus were not super-heroes - they were not the shining lights of their society. Jesus chose people who stumbled, who fell - like Peter when he denied knowing Jesus. But they were also people who allowed themselves to be picked up again.

What we need, almost more than anything else, is to realise our dependence on God. In many ways we are just like a child that is starting to walk, and needs a helping hand to get up again when it has fallen. Perhaps you can remember it from your own children - or from your grandchildren -: when they fall, they just put up their hand, and know that someone will help them get back on their feet.

Having God's light in our hearts means that we may know that there is always a hand waiting to get back on our feet. It is when we are faced by the darkness of our guilt and failure that his light shines its light of forgiveness and new hope into us. When we feel threatened and are filled with fear - when there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel - God shines his light of love and brings his peace to us. When ill-health and death cloud our days with sorrow, his light shines with the light of Easter, which - even now - carries the glow of eternity.

Why are things no different for us? - why must we go through hardship and difficulties? There is no simple answer to this question. Yet one thing is true: It is in the darkness that we go through, that God's light shines.

[Perhaps this report published by the German Bible Society in Stuttgart illustrates what it means when God's light shines into the lives of people. (From Bibel Report, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Issue IV - 2015, pages 2 and 4). The heading reads: 'With the Bible against terror':

"During a visit by the head of the Egyptian Bible-Society, Ramez Attallah, in Stuttgart, he referred to the gruesome murder of 21 Coptic Christians, who had been working in Libya, and stated: 'As Christians our task is to sow peace!'

As a result of this belief the Egyptian Bible-Society published a pamphlet titled" 'Two Rows by the Sea'.

The title-page has a picture taken from a video by the terrorist group 'Islamic State' (IS). This picture shows Egyptian Christians who were lead along a beach. The row of terrorists are all dressed in black, while the row of their victims is clad in orange overalls. These Christians had been forced to kneel, after which they had been beheaded by the men dressed in black.

On the inside of the pamphlet one of the Bible-verses printed there is from John 16:2: '... the time is coming when those who kill you will think they are doing a holy service for God.'

To think that we are experiencing this once again in our day and age!

Other verses ... emphasise love of God, the suffering and the hope of Christians.

Within a week 1.65 million copies of this pamphlet had been distributed as a protest against this violence. Even many Muslims received the pamphlet in a very positive way. ...

And then he continued: Muslim school girls had brought the pamphlet to the attention of the only Christian girl in their class. The whole class had read the pamphlet, and together with their teacher had attended the church of the Christian girl.”]

This light of God illuminates our lives - we must not ‘create’ it ourselves. We have been freed of having to always be smiling or giving the impression that everything is OK. So, even if we can’t understand why things happen, God is able to turn evil to a positive purpose.

Whatever may happen, we may hold on to this one thing: God is with us - and he lights up our lives with his loving presence.