

Sermon for the 1st Sunday after Christmas

Guest Pastor: Rev. Harald Karpe

Sermon Text: John 12:44-50

*And Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me. ⁴⁵ And whoever sees Me sees Him who sent Me. ⁴⁶ **I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in Me may not remain in darkness.** ⁴⁷ If anyone hears My words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world ⁴⁸ The one who rejects Me and does not receive My words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. ⁴⁹ For I have not spoken on My own authority, but the Father who sent Me has Himself given me a commandment – what to say and what to speak. ⁵⁰ And I know that His commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me."*

Let us pray: "Sanctify us in the truth; Your Word is truth." Amen.

Dear congregation! Darkness – we hardly know what it is anymore. Where we live, it is never really dark. Streetlamps, neon signs, light shining from the windows of our homes, moonlight – all this means that it is never really dark; you can always see something, even in the thickest fog. I experienced what darkness actually is during a children's singing week in Heldrungen. The theme was about blind Bartimaeus and we took the children to the Barbarossa Cave. After her message, I asked the guide to turn off the light for 10 seconds. It really was pitch black. There was no light, no shadow to be seen. Absolute darkness – terrifying. Hardly anyone dared to move. When the guide turned the lights back on, everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

Christmas is like when the dark world is connected to God's power grid. Jesus said: "I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in Me may not remain in darkness." It can also be translated: "...so that whoever believes in Me will not dwell in darkness." Whoever is connected to God's power grid, whoever believes in Jesus Christ, has an end to the darkness and their life shines in the light and brilliance of the Son of God. In this light, we recognize God's love and mercy, and this light brings us many additional benefits: We find hope, we find peace, we find joy, we find good fellowship, we find guidance for a successful life. With Jesus, God's light has come into the world, and where this light enters our life, night becomes day.

What does it mean that through Jesus, we are no longer in darkness? Firstly, in this light we recognize God. God doesn't remain obscure and unrecognizable, a temperamental fate that sometimes bestows happiness and sometimes strikes mercilessly. In Jesus, God shows Himself to us with a human face. And we know that even when we must endure hardship, God loves us and never burdens us more than we can bear. Secondly, we recognize the world in this light. We recognize that God has created it very well. We recognize that He has ordered it well, which is also shown in the Commandments He gave us. Despite our weaknesses and faults, we look at our fellow human beings with eyes of love because Jesus really does love everyone. We soberly perceive the world in its sin and transience, but at the same time, we know that Jesus forgives sins and has overcome the world. Thirdly, in this light, we see the future differently. For those who don't know Jesus, the transition from the old to the new year is like stepping out of the door of their house into the pitch-black darkness of Barbarossa's Cave. Nothing can be seen; you can only guess and feel. What will happen at your place of work? What will happen to your health? What will happen to your family? What about social security? What about peace? What misfortunes and catastrophes lurk in the new year? What will happen to us?

Today's people are dominated by fear of the future, which is nothing other than the darkness of going through time without faith. For those who believe in Jesus, the new year is not dark. Of course, Christians don't see everything that is coming, but they see enough. Christians know that it is a year of the Lord, and this Lord has numbered every hair on my head and no sparrow falls from a tree against His will. Anyone who enters the new year in the light of faith can do so with complete confidence, knowing that Jesus is at my side every new day and will give me good things. At the end of my journey through time, the great light of eternal glory awaits me. Fourthly, the light of Jesus dispels the darkness of sadness. When the sun shines brightly after gloomy days, hardly anyone can remain sad. That's how it is with the Sun of grace, Jesus Christ: this Sun illuminates the house of my life as bright as day and everything shines in brilliant colors. If Jesus loves me so much, why should I still be sad? If God is for me, what else should I be afraid of?

Fifthly – and this is the crucial point, Jesus brings light into the darkness of our sin. Selfishness, hate, fleeing from God, the shifting of responsibility for and onto others – all this makes life dark. Whoever lives in sin shuns the light of day; he is ashamed, he prefers to remain under the cloak of darkness. Jesus, the bright light, exposes our sin so that we can no longer hide from it. It's painful at first but it's healing because where there is bright light, things can be cleaned up properly. Even the darkest corners of our house of life can be freed from dirt. Jesus came into the world as a light to save sinners. Jesus said: "I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in Me may not remain in darkness." When a person believes in Jesus, it's as if their house of life is connected to God's power grid and shines with an unprecedented brightness. Of course, some people also say: "It's too expensive for me, I can't afford it." Yes, many people think that faith is too expensive: you have to spend a lot of time and money on church, you have to change your life completely, you have to let go of habits you've grown fond of. But that's not true. It's not expensive for us. It was only expensive for Jesus – He paid with His life for us to have light. Jesus wants to give this light to all people. Faith is nothing other than allowing this light to be given to us. What many ignorantly consider to be expensive in faith is actually the great change that occurs through the new light in their life. Of course, those who have electricity are no longer in the dark; many things change in their lives, but that is the good thing. Therefore, let us rejoice that we can live in the light of the Lord Jesus Christ and let us not pretend that we are still sitting in darkness! Amen.

And may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.