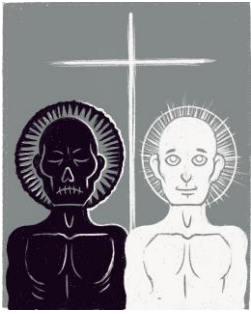


## To Live or to Be a Puppet

Sermon for the 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity

Sermon Text: Ephesians 5:8-14



*For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light<sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true),<sup>10</sup> and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.<sup>11</sup> Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.<sup>12</sup> For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.<sup>13</sup> But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible,<sup>14</sup> for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."*

People aren't computers that can be formatted according to a specific program so that they act like robots. No, we consciously, independently, and responsibly decide what we want to do or don't want to do. And we don't act automatically according to instinct but instead, we reflect on our actions. We think about what we should eat so that we stay healthy. We decide which occupation we want to choose, who we want to have at our side as a companion and make an effort to reach certain goals. Yet it can happen that people are overwhelmed by external pressures, stress, and impossible demands – whether from others or from themselves. We can lose control over our own life. Then we don't live but become like puppets. In such situations, we need a wake-up call. Something must happen or someone must remind us who we actually are and what we actually want. The apostle Paul gives us just such a wake-up call today. He reminds us that we are Christians. The apostle Paul himself knew only too well what it means to live without Christ because he knew both sides – life without Christ and life with Christ. Therefore, Paul could clearly distinguish like no one else what the difference was between both ways of living. He compared life without Christ as a deep sleep. Anyone under anesthesia puts their life in the hands of others. A person under anesthesia is first and foremost an object to whom radical, life-changing things can be done. A person under anesthesia is completely unaware and incapable of controlling what happens to him. The doctor does what is good and important to that person. We are thankful that we have something like anesthesia in the world so that we don't feel the pain. But Paul talks about a spiritual anesthesia in this text that is not good for us but is evil. And it's not a well-meaning doctor that uses this kind of spiritual anesthesia but the father of lies, Satan, who wants to lull us to sleep with dreams, fantasies, and sometimes with outright lies so that he can do what he wants to us. There is great danger that we Christians will helplessly submit ourselves to Satan's anesthesia and therefore be led into the abyss. We do that by placing our will into his hands. How can it be that people willingly place themselves into the hands of evil? The lies are the reason. God is truth and there is nothing but the truth in Him. Satan is the opposite of truth and his favorite device to use is lies. So he entangles the people again and again with ideals, half-truths, and the appearance of piety. In the Old Testament, all the people of Israel were convinced by the lies of the false prophets and were therefore repeatedly led to destruction. We also know this all too well from our world today. What unspeakable suffering has repeatedly come upon all of humanity because of the lies of a dictator. Today, lots of propaganda against God is being made using all means and all media. Sometimes it happens simply by denying God and claiming that He doesn't exist. Other times, the lie is disguised as something very pious. People should be tolerant and accept everyone...so far, that's all correct... but then comes the blatant lie that, out of sheer tolerance and philanthropy, people also say that all religions are actually true and should help us come to God. A beautifully embellished, peaceful approach is used to sell a blatant lie. In this way, many people become confused and no longer know what to believe in. Even in our private lives, we see the same

thing over and over again. People are enticed by advertising, by the allure of a drug, or by self-deception and are led to their downfall! The pharisees in Jesus' time built a wall of lies with their hypocrisy so that God's truth could no longer get through. Lulled to sleep by their delusion and arrogance, they could simply feel comfortable on their soft cushions of lies. As you can see from the previous example, there are many illustrations where people are manipulated and deceived by lies. We are also at risk of succumbing to the power of Satan without resistance due to the way of the world, to unchecked habits, or to the pressures of the usual stuff. As a result, we notice that we aren't doing the living, instead our lives are being controlled by someone else!

Paul wants to wake us up from this deep sleep. That's why he brings in the only One who can help. *"Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."* Whoever wants to be woken from this deep sleep needs Christ to shine on him. In Creation, the world is described as being chaos and dark before God spoke the words of creation. Our life without Christ is like that chaos. In such chaos, the outlines are no longer clear and we don't know what we should or should not do. We also no longer know what is true and what is untrue. But Christ shines into our lives, we become illuminated by Him and His light so that everything around us and in us becomes clear. Then Satan and all his pack of lies must yield. When a bright light shines into a dark room, the darkness has no chance – it must instantaneously give way to the light. And where there is light, there is absolutely no place for darkness. This is what happens to every person when Christ is there. Darkness must give way! It is interesting that Paul must remind Christians about this. The Christians to whom he writes were in darkness earlier and since then, have gotten to know Christ and His light. But Christians can also be deceived by Satan again and again. "Walk as children of light!" Paul reminds us. The Christians of that time lived among non-Christians, just like us. How quickly can you adjust? How quickly can you just do what everyone does? And before you know it, you're not positioning yourself according to Christ and His light but according to the darkness. We need to be reminded of this and be shaken awake. To be shaken awake can be unpleasant. I must realize that I am on the wrong path. Maybe I must change some habits or endure the ridicule of my peers. All of this can be painful. But to have Jesus' light shine on us is not unpleasant. The light of our Lord Jesus is compassionate and not unfeeling. When Jesus and His light shine on us, we very quickly become lights ourselves so that the light doesn't have to be forced or reluctantly brought out of us – it just shines freely. The wake-up call of our Lord Jesus is not like the shrill alarm clock that mercilessly calls us from our peaceful sleep into our everyday life and stress. No, it is a gentle wake-up call that calls us to life. When a child is woken up on his birthday, he doesn't need much persuasion to get up! All that happens by itself. That's how Christ is in our lives too. Just as the sun naturally brings forth life and growth everywhere, Christ also naturally brings forth the wonderful fruits of the Christian life and causes them to grow in us. The Bible often speaks about the fruit of the Holy Spirit. That is no coincidence because fruit is completely different than works. Work must be forced! Works must be done with a stern expression and a strained look; they must be done in an unnatural way and against one's own will with great effort! And if we go down the works path, we are often quick to compare ourselves to others and to judge others. Works are of people and can be, at their core, evil! Even Satan does works, but his works come from darkness and lead back to hopelessness and despair. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is different. There is no need for mathematical precision or to use a rod to force things to go right. The fruit grows all by itself because of the sun's rays. Where Jesus is, all of this happens. We firmly believe that Jesus is bringing about and will bring about this fruit in us. Where Jesus is, evil no longer thrives. Despite all the mistakes we perceive in ourselves, we believe in the effectiveness of our Lord in us. He can do much more than we can ask or imagine. Amen.