

1 John 2:3-11

Third Sunday after Epiphany

January 22, 2023

"Opposites attract." You have likely heard that statement. It may hold true for magnets and for some couples, but not for the contrast in today's text, the opposites of light and darkness. Think for a moment about the dark. We can't make it totally dark in here even if the ushers turned out the lights. So you will just have to picture the condition in your minds. Some people are scared of the dark. Noises seem louder and they imagine all kinds of spooky creatures are lurking around them. It can be difficult moving in darkness. You stumble or bump into objects. Driving in the dark presents challenges if you are trying to find an address or locate a road sign. We grumble about the cloudy days of winter or the longer hours of darkness. The darkness that John speaks about is not the absence of daylight but spiritual darkness. It is deadly not to be able to see the truth. That's not a problem as we go to the Word of God. So as we look at these verses we say,

SEE THE LIGHT

I. Know it

II. Show it

The Apostle John calls on us to see the light with full and true knowledge. As you listened to this text you probably noticed the repetition of the word "know". It was a key word in this epistle and with reason. There was a false teacher, a guy by the name of Cerinthus, who was teaching what would later develop into the movement called Gnosticism. That name comes from the Greek word for knowledge. Its supporters claimed to have a higher knowledge, better than what the Bible offered. Cerinthus was an Egyptian Jew who combined some teachings from the Old Testament, a bit of Christianity and a large dose of philosophy. Without getting too technical or detailed, his teaching brought a denial of Christ. He viewed matter as evil, yet that led to the opinion that you could live as you please, with no regard for sin. That contradiction to the claim of being a Christian was noted by the Apostle. "The man who says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he says is a liar, and the truth is not in him." That's living in darkness. It earns the charge of hypocrisy, which is pretending to be a Christian when you do not truly believe. It's a condition to be on guard against as it turns people off to hearing about Jesus from you. And God is not fooled, as John noted here.

Be assured, true knowledge is not a mere mastery of facts. You can ace a test on the content of the Bible without having a connection with Jesus. You may amaze people with your knowledge of Bible trivia but still deny the truth of it all. John

was speaking of knowing Jesus by experience; that we take to heart what we have learned of him in the Word. We have faith in him as our Savior.

Our knowledge and faith rest not in some vague, general concept of a supreme being but in the God who has revealed himself in the Bible. He is the only true God. He is the Triune God, eternal as three persons in one being, the one who created the universe by the power of his Word.

He is the loving Lord who sent his Son to rescue the world from sin. Jesus took on human flesh yet remained God. By becoming human he placed himself under divine law, which he kept with perfect obedience. He was our substitute in doing so. He has transferred the credit for that holy life to our record. Then he loaded the sins of all people on himself and went to the cross, where he suffered the agony of hell that those sins deserved. There he was forsaken by his Father, but he satisfied divine justice for each of us. He died but on the third day rose in victory, a victory which he gives to us by faith. That means eternal life in heaven is ours.

Such knowledge of our Savior and trust in him brings a blessing. The work of Jesus changes everything. It is the light shining in the darkness. Without it life is gloomy and meaningless. We are doomed, with no real hope. Life apart from Christ is filled with sin. The devil promotes the lie that it is attractive and fun, but it hurts those around us and ourselves. Most of all it racks up a record of guilt before God that merits his anger and punishment. What a sorry waste, since Jesus already endured that punishment for us!

The light of the gospel brings the good news that shines in our heart and illuminates the darkness. Yes, light will expose our sin in all its ugliness, but we need to admit our guilt before God. We repent and turn from it. The light reveals instead God's forgiving grace. It is dazzling bright. It is good news. It provides a future of hope. The gospel offers meaning for the present. Your life is going someplace that is good, not descending into further depths of despair nor plodding on a boring treadmill going nowhere. You are on the road to heaven, the gift of your loving Savior who guides and guards you along the way until you get there. That's what God has revealed in his Word. See the light. Rejoice in the light. Know and rest securely in it.

II.

Seeing the light carries an impact. Show it as you obey God's commands. "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did." Now that's a high standard. Jesus was perfect. He never once violated a command of his Father: not in thought, not in word, not in action. He was holy.

We fall short of that achievement, far short of it. We fall flat on our faces. Even for believers who were called out of darkness, shadows cross and we fail to live up to our calling. We may try hard, perhaps even think we are doing right, but still our best efforts are tainted by sin. We might do something helpful for another person, but also have false motives such as being interested in what we can get out of it in return, or seeking recognition and appreciation. We may claim obedience to some commandments, noting we have never killed anybody or cheated on our spouse, but then we are overlooking the full explanation of God's will that condemns also our attitudes like hatred and lust and our unkind or impure words. Sin is not just a matter of doing bad things but also of failing to seize the opportunities to do good and helpful acts for others. When we compare our lives with that of Jesus, we have to feel mighty uncomfortable, in fact, downright terrified. So we fall on our knees in humble confession of our sins.

That is why it is so important to know our Savior and his forgiveness. As we confess our failings he reaches out with the comforting message that he paid for all of our sins. That good news picks us up, renewing and empowering us to fight temptation successfully in the future.

That's also what makes the commandment new. John's instruction was not unheard of. It did not replace the precepts imprinted on the human heart at creation or what the Lord spelled out in the law given at Mt. Sinai. It has always been God's will. But looking at what Jesus did for us puts everything in a whole new light. Following the law is not a burdensome duty. We now want to obey God in thankful love. We delight in doing so. Our outlook changes: other people become ones to serve, not to use or take advantage of. See the light and show it.

The text also tells how: love your brother. God tells us to love all people, even our enemies, but the focus here is on our fellow believers. We have a close bond as we share faith in the Savior. So we will respond to the needs that we encounter.

In our relationship with one another opportunities arise for us to provide physical help. You can lend a hand with winter tasks like shoveling a sidewalk. In growing season, mow a lawn. Plant some flowers. Rake leaves in the fall. Pick up groceries for someone who cannot easily get out and about. You can provide help and show consideration for those who suffer losses of property or of income through setbacks like layoff or injury. You can care for those who are sick or have lost a loved one. There are emotional needs to meet by comforting someone experiencing loneliness or heartbreak. Bring a ray of sunshine into the lives of others. Today our voters consider a special opportunity, helping women with

unplanned pregnancies. It's another way to reflect the light of God's love with others.

Believers will especially provide spiritual help. We will encourage and build each other up, at least we should. But it doesn't always happen that way. Why is it that we find put downs so easy? We may come up with all kinds of smart comments but they are not always wise statements. Destructive criticism deflates instead of urging the person in the right direction. Negative words become self-fulfilling. If a person is constantly hearing he or she is worthless they soon decide not to try to succeed or to do anything worthwhile. As we think about our behavior, take note of the example you set so you do not mislead weaker Christians into sin. Watch out for false teaching and be firm in the truth so that you do not direct people into error.

Another way love for our brothers shows is in concern for those who are straying. If another believer is heading in the wrong direction with his or her life, recall them and warn of the danger to their soul. Don't do it with an air of superiority but exhibit genuine love for their eternal welfare. If other members are cutting themselves off from hearing God's saving Word, seek to urge them back.

What John offers here is not just good relationship advice. How the kingdom of God advances when all are eagerly working together in support of one another! Then God's love is made complete or reaches its goal. Show that the light of the gospel is shining in your heart and life. Walk in the light and reflect it to the world around you.

When we ponder our lives in view of John's message, we see plenty that is wrong. We don't even come close to what our Savior desires. We fail daily in showing love to our brothers and sisters in the faith. It could be discouraging. That's why we live in a state of repentance, constantly coming to our Lord in confession. He never fails to forgive. Take in his message of mercy as we receive it today in both the Word and in the visible gospel, the sacrament of Holy Communion. See the light of his grace. Experience what that divine solar power can accomplish in your life.

Not only will you see the light. As you go forth in joy, so will others, both your brothers and sisters in the faith who will be inspired by your example and potential believers who may be attracted to your message by what they see in your life. God will be praised and souls will benefit as you see and walk in the light.