

“Focus on the Light!” John 1:6-8, 19-28

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. [...]

And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” So they said to him, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”

He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.” (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) They asked him, “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”

John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Advent. Time for meditations. Time to stop. Time to rest. Time to come in God’s presence. Time to listen, to listen what God, your Creator and Redeemer speaks to you. And this goes for every Sunday, by the way.

We have for our today’s meditation this passage from the Gospel according John. The language of the Gospel according John is very simple, but at the same time deep and profound. Life and death, light and darkness, and so on.

But before we get to John’s message, let just look around. What the world where we live today is like? There are many reasons for us to complain about it. We could say that this world is disoriented. Or we can say lost, confused.

Many people would like to do the right thing, to live fulfilled and meaningful lives. This desire is built into us, literary built into us by our Creator. But so often people don’t know how to do it.

They hear different voices in culture sending them different directions. Thus some people strive for something they can’t possible achieve, others settle for so little as if there was not much more in this life.

Some people strive hard to pursue their goals, to get what they believe will give them fulfillment, or status, or value, or power, or will justify their existence. But it is a never ending story, it seems that every time there is something more needed...

Others follow different path, they settle for a minimum. If they have satisfied their primary needs, that's it, they don't need anything else, they become complacent and lazy to seek for anything greater than their belly.

In the midst of this there is in our culture more and more restlessness, anxiety, depression, emptiness. However, we don't need to think that our culture is somehow unique in this respect. This is the story of many cultures all around the world at all times.

There is one word which can characterize this situation of disorientation, disorder, and lack of clarity about who we are and why we are here, this lack of purpose and meaning. This one word is - darkness. Yes, darkness.

You know what the darkness is, right? It is when you can't see. You don't know where you are. You don't know where to move, not what is around. You are lost. Lost in darkness.

Darkness in the Bible describes the state when there is no God's order. When chaos reigns. Thus in the very beginning before God ordered His creation there was darkness and lack of order. In this darkness and chaos God cause light to shine. And it was good. Very good.

Now we get to our today's passage. "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about *the light*, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light."

At Jesus time darkness in this world was even thicker than it is today. At least not much different. Yes, there were unbelievable achievements when it came to architecture, or road systems or maintaining order in Roman empire, but at the same time people were disoriented in darkness without true light.

In this time a man came, sent by God, his name was John. He came to bear witness about the light. So that people can see, can understand, can be changed and live in the light. And many of them did.

There are so many things for which we need to criticize our culture. But there are also so many things for which we need to love our culture and to be grateful. We have discussed it many times, that our Western civilization with all its blessings is Christianity's gift to humanity.

This is not an opinion. This is a historical reality. Anyone can check it and see that things like public education, social welfare system, medical welfare system, just laws, human rights, science, technology, our values of care, generosity, justice, equality, and so on, and so on, that they all have come from Christianity.

Or you can put it this way, - all these wonderful blessings are results of people in the West living and walking in the light. In the light of Jesus Christ. Being able to see, to understand, and to live in accordance to God's will.

This light transformed the world. These are the Father's blessings which He so generously pours on us. Day after day, day after day... they are so many that we even don't notice them anymore. We've got so used to them.

But once we understand where we come from, we need to ask this question – *what has gone wrong with us?* Why our Western culture, despite of all God's blessing, is sliding back into darkness again. What is wrong with it?

The answer is very simple. Very simple. We have turned away from the light. From the true light that is Jesus Christ. You all know how it works. When you come to light, when you stay at the presence of the light, you can see.

You can see how things are. Then we can see who are we, why are we here, how we can live fulfilled, purposeful and joyful lives. We see what is right and what is wrong. We can see all of this for we live and walk in the light of Christ.

When we are in the light it shines on every aspect of our lives. Then this light shapes how we go about marriage and family, about parenting, how we do our work, business and education, how we contribute to community, how we rest, and how we build our relationships with our Creator and Redeemer.

Now, and this is what has happened and is happening with our culture. It has turned away from the light. Our culture thinks that this is our wisdom that created this wonderful civilization, and not the light of Christ.

It can easily happen. You walk in the light and begin to think that you see, that you are wise because you are such a clever person. You begin to despise the light of Christ, and gradually turn away from it. You begin to think that you are the light.

Think about it, if you turn your back to the light, and keep walking, you will not be in darkness right away. Initially it may seem that nothing has changed. You still can see, or know what is right and what is wrong.

We can call this transitional state Christian values, or Christian ethos, or living as Christians, meaning good people, or in any other wonderful and spiritually sounding way.

Sadly, it doesn't change the harsh reality. Once we have turned away from the very source of the light, it is only a matter of time, but eventually we'll find ourselves in darkness.

Thus with every generation the light gradually grows dimer and dimer and darkness takes over. If being in Christ's presence shapes our whole lives, relationships with God, marriages, parenting, work, rest, and so on...

...then moving away from the light, there remains less and less of what is enlightened by Christ. Darkness and chaos takes over one by one, one by one all aspects of our lives. This is where our culture is right now. This is where many of our loved ones are right now.

The crux of this situation is this. While people are still not too far from the light of Christ, they think that everything is fine, they've got, and they don't realize that every step will lead them further in darkness.

What can we do? What should we do? We need to take on the mission of John the Baptist. What was he doing? It was very simple. He was bearing witness about the light. About Jesus Christ.

It may seem quite simple. But there is one catch. John was preparing people for Jesus' coming. Many people listen to his message. Many even believed that He was the one who was promised from the beginning of the world.

Imagine that many people would come to you trusting that you are the light, that you may have the answers. How tempting would it be, to imagine that, yes, I'm someone who knows the stuff... Come to me, and I'll enlighten you...

It is a temptation for pastors, it is a temptation for Christians. To witness about ourselves, and not about the light. To testify about ourselves, and not about Christ. I was bad, now I'm good. Or others are bad, we are good. No, no, no... We need to learn from John the Baptist.

When leaders of Jewish people saw how many came to John, they asked Him. "Who are you?" Then John confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." I am not the promised Savior. Don't look at me!

"What then? Are you Elijah?" They asked this for prophet Malachi had foretold that prophet Elijah will come before the Christ. So John said: "No, I am not him either."

Then they asked: "Are you the Prophet?" Why this question? For already through Moses God has foretold that He will raise a prophet like Moses from among the Jews and they will have to listen to him.

And John answered again: "No, I'm not Him". "Then who are you?" Then John said: "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'"

I am only a voice... John wasn't pointing to himself. He said: "... among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."

This can easily be our message. "*Among you* stands one you don't know..." Just think about these words. Jesus Christ is among us. Even if so many don't know and don't want to know.

Yes, He is among us. He has promised to be with you till the end of this age. But He is also among those who are still far from Him. He is next to them. Waiting, calling, inviting. Not to judge, but to love, to forgive, to restore.

Listen carefully to these words, take them to your heart. He is with you, and He will never leave you, and will never forsake you. He is the Son of God, to Him is given all, all [!] authority in heaven and on earth, but ... He is with you quietly...

He will not impose His presence to you. Just think, He gives you freedom to ignore Him, if you chose to. To ignore your Creator and Redeemer who cares for you every day. Yes, He has revealed what will happen at the end.

Yes, He has showed how much He loves you, each of you, by offering His life in exchange to yours, and you also know the story of the world. You know how it will end. And you have this incredible freedom – You can go your own way.

For He wants you to love Him freely. Without coercion. To trust Him, to rely upon Him. Knowing that whatever your situation may look like, the Son of God, the light of the world is with you and nothing is going to change it.

He is with you, and one day, you will be with Him. This is our ultimate hope and ultimate joy. So let's join John the Baptist testifying about the light which has come into this world. So that lives can be changed and in the midst of disorderly world there could be true peace.

Amen.