

Light drives the darkness out. Sermon on 1. Advent Romans 12, 8-12



8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. **9** The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." **10** Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. **11** And do

this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

What is love? That is the question. Does love mean that you have to accept everyone? Yes! Certainly! Does love mean that you have to accept everything? No! I think this distinction is truly necessary because a lot of nonsense is perpetrated under the guise of love. Not so long ago, for example, four men were married to each other. All of this was done in God's name and in the name of the church. The pastor justified the ceremony by saying that the four men truly loved each other. Here is a very clear case where, in the name of love, God is completely exorcised from the equation, and only the supposed love remains. If love were the sole criterion, people could just as easily marry their dachshund or canary. Because I'm sure that many people love these animals too. Therefore, the question is all the more important: What is love, anyway?

To understand this, it helps to take a closer look at the Greek biblical concepts of love. In the Greek language, there are, in fact, three words for love. Firstly, there is the term *Phileo*, which describes platonic love; secondly, *Eros*, which describes the love between a man and a woman; and thirdly, *Agape*, which describes God's self-sacrificing love without any conditions. In the verses from Romans, Paul uses the term *Agapeo* exclusively. It is therefore about divine love. For Paul, this love is the foundation and framework within which all of God's commandments are fulfilled. Without this love, the commandments themselves are meaningless. It is not about replacing God's commandments with a romantic love, as if to say, "Since we truly love each other, we can do anything." On the contrary: God's love gives us the strength and is, in fact, the very source of our ability to love our neighbor. Furthermore, it becomes clear that the love Paul describes here also includes a very conscious decision. He speaks of the divine *kairos* having arrived, the moment to choose this love. When the Greek word *kairos* is used in the Bible, it means that God has designated a specific time for something to happen. Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection are such *kairos* moments in the history of our salvation. Applied to our lives, we are in a *kairos* moment because we await the Second Coming of Christ, and therefore time is short. The *kairos* moment is thus a crucial moment of decision: *"12The night is far gone, the day is near. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light."*

The time we live in is therefore a time of important decisions. And what is that decision? We look to God to find the answer. And there I see that God, in his entire being, is fully committed and completely focused on us. Our perspective as humans seems to be the opposite. Let me compare this perspective to the selfie mode on our phones. As you know, all modern phones have a camera. And this camera can be used from both sides. You can point it outwards and photograph the people and the world around you. Or you can set the camera to selfie mode. Then the camera is looking at me, and I can take a picture of myself. God, in his love, has no selfie mode. He is always focused on the other. And when we are within the framework of God's love, our perspective also changes. Away from ourselves and towards the other. Now I also understand why Paul uses the word *agape*, namely divine love. Because this love, which is focused on the other, is divine and not human. Our human thinking is by nature focused on ourselves. Divine love is therefore a spiritual miracle that happens within us and initiates a dramatic turning point of the axis. This changes everything. To understand all this a little better, I would like to consider the situation of the Apostle Paul himself and how his viewpoint was changed. I imagine his letter to the Romans something like this:

It was a truly dangerous time when Paul wrote the letter to the Romans. Especially at night, soldiers with short swords walked from house to house and murdered Christians. The church in Rome was almost decimated. And then there was also the false teaching against which he had to defend the Gospel. Paul was tired of the battles and tired of Satan's temptations. What can one do against such powers, he thought? In the distance, he saw a light and heard sounds that distracted his thoughts a little. He heard the sounds from the house of Aquila and Priscilla. And from their kitchen, the light cast a bright glow, reaching into his small room across the street. Aquila and Priscilla were preparing a meal. Once again, they were about to invite guests. The congregation was to meet. They planned to sing psalms, read the Bible, hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, and then pray for all the world's needs... Aquila and Priscilla, as they had so often done, had everything well prepared. Paul's heart warmed when he thought of Aquila and Priscilla. They were like a lighthouse in the congregation and in the entire city of Corinth. What power shone from them!... Paul thought of the Romans, and suddenly the words flowed from his pen again. The hatred and persecution of the state can do nothing against the Gospel, he wanted to say. If we remain in the light of Jesus, even Satan cannot attack us. "Owe no one anything, except to love one another..." he scribbled. In his writing, he brought together what does not normally belong together: the law and love. In his letter to the Romans, Paul had just described in detail how the law without Christ has a deadly effect. When people try to uphold the law alone, they become hypocritical. For they can never do it alone. Satan wants to laugh at such people. How easy it is for him to kill Christians using their own methods! "Do the right thing, and you will earn heaven!"

Or, to put it in modern terms: "As long as you love each other, everything is fine and you can do anything." And with precisely such well meaning statements we Christians are busily digging our own graves. But with Christ and his power, everything is different. Paul saw the light of Aquila and Priscilla and could already hear the first guests arriving. The light from Aquila and Priscilla's house shone across the street into his room and brightened his heart as well. Once again, he saw complete strangers standing there. They, too, were drawn by the light of Aquila and Priscilla, even though they had no idea where the light came from! Yes, no one can do anything against the light of love, not even the Roman state! The small church in Rome was driven out. Some were even killed. But love cannot be extinguished. For love is not initiated by people, but by God himself.

Therefore, it must remain. As surely as the sun will rise tomorrow, so too will the darkness of Satan be driven out. Darkness can do nothing against God and his love! Paul wanted to encourage the Christians in Rome. That's why he continued: The darkness you are experiencing in your lives now is not eternal. It must pass away. But God and his love are eternal. Therefore, "let us put aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light." The light the Apostle Paul spoke of has still not been extinguished. The Romans could not extinguish it. Nor could many other governments. Even today, the light of the Gospel shines into the whole world. The light has also come to us. Today, as a symbol of this light, we have lit a candle on the Advent wreath. From now on, we will light a new candle every week until Christmas when celebrate the birth of Christ. With this, we want to say exactly what Paul said back then. Around us, it is still dark. Around us, there are still many things that make us sad and hopeless. There is still persecution of Christians today. And there is endless suffering in various parts of the world where people are tortured and killed. But despite all this, Satan can never extinguish the light of Jesus Christ. We Christians feel much the same way today. We are celebrating Helmut and Erika's wedding anniversary. With deep gratitude, we remember what God has done for you. Surely there were times when you couldn't always feel or long for love. Sometimes it was necessary to make the conscious decision to stay together and be there for each other, even when the feeling was lacking. And it is precisely for this decision that we need help and strength from above. Alone, we are helpless and without direction. But when Christ dwells in us through baptism, there is a light source in our lives. We are drawn to Christ again and again. And he is the light that shines within us. Amen.