



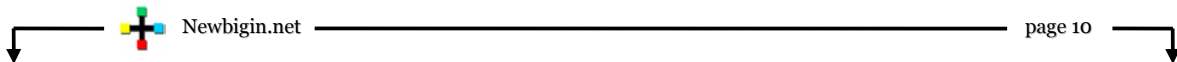
Light of the Risen Lord

(94lrl)

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'This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light and in him there is no darkness at all... If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all evil' (1 John 1:5 and 7).

It is to St John that we owe the sentence 'God is love'. It is therefore a striking fact that when he seeks to find the phrase which most concisely states the heart of the gospel he uses the words 'God is light'.

Light is that which makes it possible to distinguish between reality and illusion, between truth and fantasy. 'Let there be light' is therefore the first word of creation, and the one who comes as the beginning of a new creation is therefore first and foremost light - the light of the world, the light that shines upon every human being.

Some kinds of piety shun the hard light of day and prefer the 'dim religious light' where fantasies can be entertained. The coming of Jesus into the world is the coming of the light in which all things are seen as they truly are. It unmasks and exposes all the strategies by which we seek to create a private world in which my 'experience' is the measure of all things.

It therefore makes it possible for us to live in a shared world, a world of which I am no longer the centre. To walk in the light means being willing to be exposed and therefore vulnerable. The condition for this is an act of trust, and trust is only possible when there is truth – truthful speaking and truthful acting. True fellowship, that is to say, shared participation in a real world, in a world of realities beyond myself, is only possible on the basis of trust, and trust is a product of truthfulness.

Light, truth, trust, fellowship – one can easily see the links that hold these together. But there is a further term, to which we must return, which does not seem to fit so easily into this logical progression: the blood of Jesus.

When we say 'God is light', we are not dealing with stratospheric abstractions which do not immediately touch our lives. 'Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil' (John 3:19). The coming of the light unmasks our pretences. We who claim to be lovers of truth are found to be its enemies.

The presence of the light in the person of Jesus precipitates the concentration of the combined powers of religion, law and public opinion to snuff it out. If that were the last word, then creation would be undone and darkness would be all. If that were the end, the suicide of Judas would be the only authentic commentary on the death of Jesus.

But the darkness which cannot comprehend the light also cannot overwhelm it. The light bursts forth in the glory of the risen Lord. In that light we can have fellowship with one another because our untruthfulness has been exposed in a light which is both judgement and grace. In the presence of the cross and in the body of the risen Lord, we can be utterly honest with each other and with the world because our sin has been forgiven and taken away and there is no more need for illusion.

Apart from that, who can dare to 'walk in the light'? Who can dare to have the full truth about himself, about herself, exposed? Who will dare to risk that total honesty which is the condition for mutual trust and therefore the condition for living in a shared world?

Much in our contemporary world draws us into increasing privatisation, increasing preoccupation with the self, its development, its self-fulfilment. Much religion shares in this privatisation.

In a letter I received yesterday from a friend in Finland he wrote that his contemporaries 'are not accustomed to speak of the gospel in the proud clear way that the reformer Luther did: the gospel, faith and those things are just "something and somewhere – not too explicit and not too concrete, and – surely – deeply private".'

When we gather around the Lord's table for the public worship of the church, we confess publicly that there is a place where we can dare to walk in the light, to face all truth about ourselves and about the world, because of that mighty act by which the power of darkness was overcome. It is possible to walk in the light because the blood of Jesus cleanses us from sin.

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