

SERMON

Sermon for Whit Monday

Gustaf Wingren

John 3:1–15 (16–17)

13 May 1940

In Gamleby Church.

Text: John 3:16–21.

Hymns: 136:1, 30:1–3, 45:8, 33:1–6, 342:8–9.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

The highest Father's only Son

He was born here, to our great joy

Laid in the manger on hay and straw

He will not despise us poor ones. Glory be to God!

A ray of divinity mild and pure

He gives the world a new light

And shines in the dark night

Those who have set their hope on him. Glory be to God!

Though he was despised and poor

With eternal love his breast burned

To make the earth joyful

And man like the angels of heaven. Glory be to God!

In all that has happened through him

God has shown us his love

Let all Christendom rejoice at this

And praise God in eternity. Glory be to God! Amen. (Sv.Ps. 62: 2, 4, 6, 7)

"The world" is a very common word in the Gospel of John. As a rule not something directly evil, which is on the hunt for the good in order to kill it. "The world" is the world of men, a mixture of good and evil.

We look about us on the earth, discover a/ the hatred, the lie, the war – b/ the mother's care for the child, the worker's striving to do a good work, the attempts to find the truth and to be just.

Good and evil mixed together. That is the world.

God loves this world. It is his, created by him, every human being is created by him, even the worst criminal.

God loves the world so, that he will go into it, such as it is, set it right, feed his life into it.

Therefore Christ came into the world. God himself entered into the conditions that mark the life of the earth: hunger, thirst and all that is repulsive. Christ did not shrink from anything that belongs to the earth, except one thing: sin, unrighteousness, violence. Evil he had come to combat with the stake of his life, in order that man might get a foothold for his faith and be able to lay hold of God himself and so endure in the mixture between good and evil that the world is.

Thereby she would be able to be salvaged over to the kingdom of God, to "eternal life", when the time of the present mixture is ended, when a judgment shall take place, where good comes on one side and evil on the other. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

When Christ comes this judgment already takes place. Judgment = separating, sifting, division.

Christ came not to condemn, he came to save, "to shine in the dark night". But when the light begins to shine, then the sifting, the judgment, takes place of itself. It is as with the sun. It gives life to that which is the power of life: grass, flowers, trees, the whole of nature and man himself. It grows and sprouts in the sun. It reveals the ugly.

But the seeds of disease and rottenness, their power is killed by the sun, it is destroyed and judged in the light and the warmth when life awakens. The sun helps the powers of life and overthrows the powers of death.

In the same way a sifting took place when Christ came to our earth. There was evil and good. They were separated. Evil raised the cross against heaven. "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light."

But precisely in the cross faith got a foothold. Through the centuries the people of faith have directed their eyes toward this cross, where Love is nailed fast. For Christ is the light and this light shines only clearer, purer in the night of the cross. And "he that doeth truth cometh to the light, comes to Christ." Good and evil are thereby separated. Hatred of Christ and faith in Christ are separated.

Here it is carefully necessary to take note of the words of the text. – Christ is the light. "He that doeth truth cometh to the light". A human being can therefore "do the truth" without yet being arrived at Christ. Still clearer does this become in the last sentence of the text: "he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." The deeds that he did beforehand were wrought in God, and this becomes manifest when he comes to the light, Christ.

We ask then: can a human being who is not a Christian, who is not yet arrived at the light, can such a human being do something good? Answer: yes. The text is clear and plain. Jesus says further to the Pharisees in the Gospel of Luke: "Why judge ye not of yourselves what is right?"

The good Samaritan. They asked Jesus who was one's neighbour, and he told of a Samaritan. We shall not try to complicate it and add something: nowhere does it appear that this Samaritan was a disciple of Christ. He was a human being who did his duty toward a brother in need, plain and simple. Or: the widow's mite. Paul knows that the Gentiles are a law unto themselves (Rom 2)

How can this come about? It comes about from this, that God has created the world and "still upholds it". God's righteousness is mixed into the world, such as it is. God works even outside Jesus Christ. This is Luther's great discovery. Luther saw God's love in Jesus Christ, God who stepped down into the world, suffered on the cross, gave himself out as a trampled and mocked

love on the earth. But equally important, if one will understand Luther, is this: the same love of God that was in Christ, the same love is active in creation. God has created the family, earthly work, which is designed for service, the peoples, the state. Therefore: he who has met God's love in Christ, he goes out into the calling, into the family, he serves his people, he obeys the authorities.

But in this earthly world God can do the good even through human beings who do not believe on his son: he who declares right, he does the truth, even if he is not a Christian, likewise the father and mother who bring up their child to be a good human being, the statesman who readily serves his people, the teacher and schoolmistress who strive to make good human beings of their class – all this is good and comes from God, for God has created all this and is himself near in all such uprightness, even if the human being does not know it, does not think of God when he performs it. All this is such deeds concerning which it once, if not sooner, then at the last judgment, shall become manifest that they "are wrought in God".

But we must not forget what we said at the beginning: that the world is a mixture of good and evil, of God's work and the devil's work. The world is the field in which God sows his good seed, but in the night the enemy comes and sows tares – and both grow up together. Therefore Christ means a judgment, a sifting, between evil and good: on the one side the cross that human beings raised, on the other side the faith that awakens in the human breast. But most important of all is this: however uprightly you act, however you strive after what is good on the earth – you never reach eternity in that way. God has not established family, school, people, state or any calling and profession on the earth in order thereby to grant eternal life. All these good creations on the earth are for the earth, in order in this perishable world to give outward good gifts to the children of men. You who live a righteous life in this outward earthly sense, you know it also yourself: you feel in the midst of all your striving a poverty, a sort of smarting emptiness there inside in the heart, you long for something lasting, something "beyond the mountains, beyond the flowers and the song, after something beyond the stars, beyond your hot heart". It is the being of eternity in you that sighs and is distressed under the tyranny of perishableness, that dwells here, although the world is God's world.

And now – now we have come over to a wholly other reality. Now it is no longer a matter of doing something good on the earth, of according to poor ability doing one's part for right and truth and mercy. Now you are not turned toward the neighbour, but toward God, the Almighty, who has created all the world and from whom all good comes. Now the question is

of a righteousness that holds the measure in God's light, which no human being can endure. Come then not with all the good works that you do on the earth! They are not yours, but you have done them because the Creator has you in his hand, they are God's works, which he has done through you in the place in the world where he has set you to work. What is yours in these works, yours and not God's, that is their weakness, their stains, their impurity – this is truly yours when you come before the face of God. Here nothing avails that is in man. If it becomes a question of eternal life, then this word holds: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." In order to give eternal life God himself stepped down into our world in his elect, Jesus Christ – he took the form of a servant when he came in the form of a man, and he let evil human beings go to the attack against him, silent as a lamb, patient unto death and unshakably merciful unto death. "Though he was despised and poor, with eternal love his breast burned, to make the earth joyful and man like the angels of heaven." This eternal life of love and mercy evil could not bind, could not blot out from the surface of the earth. The crucified one broke free from the grip of evil when the stone was rolled away on Easter morning – and now he bears the eternal life to every generation, through every pitch-black century of war and bloodshed, he is near us today with the eternal life, which no other has in his possession.

On him, and on him alone, not on anything in yourself, not even your Christianity, may you build your hope of eternal life. However starless the night stands, in the world and in your own poor life – never can that light go out which streams forth from him.

A ray of divinity mild and pure

he gives the world a new light

and shines in the dark night

those who have set their hope on him. Glory be to God! Amen