

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 4:3-6

THEME: God Has Made His Light Shine

1. In Our Hearts
2. In Our Lives

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Dear Christian Friends:

Valentine's Day is almost here, but you don't need me to tell you that. Hearts are everywhere. The card stores are filled with heart-shaped cards, the candy stores display heart-shaped candies or candy boxes, and the clothing stores have sales on clothes decorated with hearts. And you'll have to take out a loan to buy a dozen long-stemmed red roses.

In our reading today, Paul talks about hearts and the mighty miracle that God has worked in ours. Medical science can do wonderful things with hearts—open clogged arteries and insert stents, implant pacemakers, and even perform transplants, but medical science cannot do what God has done.

As Paul tells us, God **"made his light shine in our hearts."** Our heart trouble was not caused by plaque or cholesterol; it was caused by unbelief. Every one of us is born with the kind of heart the Lord described to Noah after the flood when he said, **"Every inclination of [man's] heart is evil from childhood" (Gn 8:21).** Every inclination! Within our hearts when we were born, there was not the slightest "inclination" to believe in Jesus as Savior or come to him for forgiveness of sins and eternal life. The human heart is rather, as Jesus said, a cesspool from which come **"evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Mt 15:19).**

To be sure, many people today object to that biblical assessment of our hearts, insisting that some spark of good must still be found there by nature. They only prove the truth of the prophet's words: **"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jer 17:9).**

To know the real, sordid condition of the human heart by nature is to be amazed at the mighty miracle God has performed in our hearts by his Holy Spirit—causing his light, the light of faith in Jesus Christ, to shine. Once by his mighty power God lit up the dark world; it took that same mighty power—not a puny human choice or decision—to create faith in our hearts. And now

we know ourselves as God does—by nature sinful and unclean. But we also know Jesus as he is—our Redeemer from sin and hell—because GOD HAS MADE HIS LIGHT SHINE IN OUR HEARTS.

And GOD HAS MADE HIS LIGHT SHINE IN OUR LIVES. My family and I used to camp at Orchard Beach State Park in Manistee. Sometimes we had a travel trailer or a pop-up camper but one year we had a tent. It was amazing how turning a light on inside that tent caused it to glow in the darkness. The light shining on the inside could be seen shining brightly by those outside. Of course, you had to be careful what you did with the light on inside the tent because others could see everything. It works that way in the tents of our earthly bodies too.

Look at the change that took place in Paul. By his own admission, he had been a **“blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man” (1 Tm 1:13)**. But that changed, Paul says, **“When God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me” (Ga 1:15-16)**. The light shone within, but the glow could be on the outside, and word spread throughout Judea that **“the man [Paul] who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy (Ga 1:23)**. He preached God’s Son and made himself a servant to God’s people. The apostle’s life was aglow with God’s light.

May it be that way with us as well! **“You were once darkness, but now you are the light in the Lord,”** Paul told God’s people in Ephesus. **“Live as children of light” (5:8)**. It isn’t hard. Just be what God made you: as redeemed children of God, serve the Lord with gladness; as members of one body, live in harmony with your brothers and sisters in Christ, forgiving them as God has forgiven you; as lights in this dark world, always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have.

But it isn’t hard to keep that light from shining either. All we need to do is join the unbelieving world in its coarse and foolish conversation and its impure and indecent behavior (and much of that was covered in the Superbowl commercials and half-time show), and the glow of God’s light will quickly disappear from your life. Let us acknowledge and confess that by sinful word and work we’ve hidden the light that God lit in our hearts, and let us find forgiveness in Jesus. In the warmth of his love, rekindle the fire of love for God so that the light in your heart will show in your life. Amen.