

⁸Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet'; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' ¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. ¹¹Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹²the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light;" Romans 13: 8-12

Today we are celebrating the tenth Sunday in Advent - according to the calendar of Aldi, Penny, Tengelmann, Möbel-Segmüller and Co. Although I should know by now, it still leaves me stunned every year when I suddenly find myself in front of gingerbread, Santa Claus, spiced Christmas biscuit or even a decorated Christmas tree while shopping in the last week of September.

The Advent and Christmas business begins right after the end of the summer vacations. In business terms, 27th September was the first Sunday in Advent, and today we have just reached the tenth Sunday in Advent.

These forward prolonged festive seasons - it is the same with Easter - have consequences that we do not necessarily perceive immediately. When the light of the August and September sun merges seamlessly into the light of the Advent candles, then there happens more than just the fact that we can buy Christmas cookies in late summer.

Besides the fact that it is all about business, we have to ask:

What does it mean when October and November are skipped, when autumn is faded out as a season, and as a lifetime, as a symbol of deeper truths?

What happens there, when in the course of the year the darkness of November, the fog, the bad weather, the melancholy, the night, the Sunday in commemoration of the dead do not occur anymore?

There is a deep truth - in the course of the year and the church year - that after the summer comes the time of volatileness, the autumn, also the autumn of our life, the time of surrender, of dark thoughts, of death - a time into which then surprisingly the light of Advent breaks, first small with a single candle, then more and more until the bright light of Christmas shines on us.

And with it the message: Not into the summer with its light, but into the darkness of the world, into the transience of our life, into our thoughts and fears of death, the light of God comes, God himself comes.

"Those who lived in a land of deep darkness - on them light has shined" (Isaiah 9, 2)

When Advent begins in September, it becomes banal, empty and has nothing more to tell. Then it's all about money anyway. Next to the golden calf is the golden manger, the golden baby Jesus, and later the gilded Easter Bunny.

Behind it not only the coming of God disappears - behind it all those disappear, who need the coming of God more than anything else - the November and Good Friday people, who live in darkness, full of grief and pain, who are totally desperate in their search for a perspective for their life, who die in the Congo and are shot in the West Banks, starve to death in North Korea and are tortured in China. The Advent season in September makes them invisible - all who are unimportant for the Christmas business or who might disturb it because they do not fit into the glittering artificial world.

The message that God comes into our world to give light and salvation, bread and a roof over their heads to these very people is also declared meaningless. Meaningless, that God has these very people in mind and puts those in the center of attention, who are nothing but needy, nothing but hungry for light and life, for something to eat and a warm blanket, for attention and medicine, for a word of consolation and encouragement on their deathbed.

Gingerbread and spiced Christmas biscuits on September 27th tell more than that it is all about business. It is a profound and fundamental attack on the roots of our faith.

So what?

We need light in Advent. The light of our human mind that perceives and the light of the Word of God to reflect on our roots.

Remember from Romans 13: "It is now the moment to wake from sleep. The night is far gone, the day is near."

No one is rushing us into an unconscious pre-Christmas stress, which then leaves us exhausted under the Christmas tree. Here we are tempted to get up because there is a tense anticipation in the air. Not a gray everyday life, a bright morning announces itself. Paul draws the curtain a little bit, so that our face is touched by the first rays of the sun as soon as it rises. It is time to wake up. It is time to rise. Something is coming towards you that needs all your vigilance! Rub the night from your eyes, Christians! For the night has far gone, the day is near!

Now this does not necessarily apply to our present attitude to life, that the night is fading away and a new morning is approaching. We are rather under the opposite impression that darkness on this earth is increasing: Worldwide political and religious conflicts. Growing social tensions. Love seems to cool down more and more. It looks dark. Because we still see so much darkness, we Christians, too, tend to pull the blanket over our heads.

Paul contradicts: You Christians, do not remain lying there tired of hope! Do not hide yourselves away like so many others in fear of the future.

Yes, it is still dark. But the day, God's day, is near. Since Easter morning the bad dream is over, the nightmare is over, that this earth has nothing good to expect anymore. Christ is coming to this world - and with him comes light. Therefore wake up, go to meet him by spreading light yourselves!

Whoever gets out of bed in the morning hangs up his pyjamas and puts on his or her every day outfit. We, who are going to meet the coming Christ, should do the same - take off our nightdress. Take off the clothes that we still wear from the Sunday in commemoration of the dead - now it is Advent. Take off resignation and indifference. Discard all ruthlessness. Take off the grey cloak of indistinctness, because we do not want to be identified.

Paul introduces us to the Advent dress code: Take off the nightdress, he says. Dress for the day, dress festively! “Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light”

Advent becomes the symbol of our existence: on the way through the night, towards the morning. „My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning," sighs the author of the Psalm 130.

He has already become a watchman of the morning. Night watchmen have only one fear: that their fire and their light are turned off. That is why we so often are a nation of night watchmen: we are only interested in keeping our own fire burning. As morning watchmen, we have no such worries, for we know that soon there will be an abundance of warmth and light. Our own lantern soon will become worthless. So: Why don't we share our light now?

Here we are in the middle of this second part of the Ten Commandments, with which the Roman text began: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

Now a candle can be lit up for the neighbor.

For he is like you! For she is like you!

The person next to us needs the light as we do, needs love as we do. So let us owe no one anything except to love, to care, to live a clear and open life. Let us also not owe our society our contradiction when political decisions are declared as fair and just, which only cost the weak and small ones something.

Contradiction to the status quo can also be a way of loving - loving those who otherwise have no voice, who are in the dark, who are of no importance for the world of business.

Let us share Christ's love.

God walks with us through the night. God shows us how to turn from being night watchmen into watchmen of the morning.

Hope and love will return into our society; there will be bread for the world in our bags and a candle, an Advent light from which darkness flees.