



Predigt im Hochschulgottesdienst

United Theological College

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The Final Judgment

31 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. **32** Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. **33** And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. **34** Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. **35** For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, **36** I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ **37** Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? **38** And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? **39** And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ **40** And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers,[a] you did it to me.’

41 “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. **42** For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, **43** I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ **44** Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ **45** Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ **46** And these will go away into eternal



punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Grace, mercy and peace to you, in the name of the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, Amen

It's a great honour for me, celebrating this service together with you. So I want to thank you for your Hospitality on the UTC and your warm hearted reception for our small German delegation. It is like coming to brothers and sister of a family. There is a small anecdote from the famous theologian scholar and author Dorothe Sölle, when she came back from a visit of Christian parishes in the civil-war time in Nicaragua, she was asked by a journalist: What have you done there, have you a family over there? She said, that she was so shocked by that question, that she couldn't find an answer. "Later on", she said, "I found the right answer to the journalist". I should have said: "Sure, I have, don't you?"

When Christians come to visit each other, this is a gathering of a family. We find in our worship, in our common prayer, in our sorrow and lamentations, in the symphony of our singing and in our work the deepest root of our discipleship. We are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, all over the world. And coming together, singing or praying in different languages, in different contexts, different melodies, we feel, that we are one in Him.

We were listening to one of the crucial passages of the gospel in the reading of the text about the final judgement. This is so decisive, cause it gives us the real background for our serving and acting in the words of our Lord. And it combines two different aspects of our faith, which we often separate from each other. This text describes two different ways of living, to different ways of perceiving the world, two different ways of understanding eternity.

This passage tempts us to simplify theological differences. Some take these words very easily. "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the

least of these brothers of mine, you did for me'. Mt 25, they say is a concrete obligation for our discipleship in this world. The word gives us a practical duty, how we should serve the Lord. It is an ethical issue: help the poor, give food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, welcome the stranger and clothe the naked. All that is right. But that simplifies the story. In this argument, we would translate our doing in a pure humanistic approach. And, what's even more dangerous, we could take it as an example for self-justification. Sometimes our diaconal work lives in this risky argument. But Jesus is talking about the last judgement. He gives a broader perspective for our live, which we rarely used. It is not an obligation for these days only it is a duty according to the context of the eternal of men. The word is focusing on our whole existence in Jesus Christ. Some others say, he is talking about the coming world, so it has no direct impact on our doing right now. But: Our faith is not an ethical issue. And it is not a spiritual facet. It is from the very beginning a coin with two sides: The spiritual dimension brings us to concrete deeds. When we explain our believe from our deeds the faith loses its root. The Faith is not a function it is the overwhelming reality that Jesus Christ is in us, like it is said in the letter to the Galatian: I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Gal 2,20

I want to give you two aspects on this strong combination of spiritual and diaconal work. First I want to tell in a few words about the situation in our churches in Germany in these days, according to the phenomena of one Million refugees in our country. The lives of migrants who are seeking a better place to live and of refugees or displaced people fleeing their own countries due to war, conflicts and environmental degradation are increasing at risk. The world is shocking by daily news about the tragedies to which these peoples fall victims, and the main focus for this phenomena is the middle east, with Syria, North Iraq and Lebanon and Jordan.

We have to remember, that the rural-to-urban migration had been part of human life

for millennia. People had been moving from country to the city since about 3000 B.C., when the first urban formations took shape in the Persian Gulf and soon spread across Asia and Europe. In your country you are realising this phenomena in a new dimension in the last two decades.

Migration as the most challenging transformation in the twenty-first century. When we think, what will be remembered about the twenty-first century, more than anything else except perhaps the effects of a changing climate, is the great and final shift of populations out of rural, agricultural life and into cities. We will end this century as a wholly urban species. Delhi and Bangalore are signs of this extreme move. And the exiting and may be dangerous situation of this move is, that the new overcrowded places are the places where the next great economic and cultural boom will be born, or where the next great explosion of violence will occur. The difference depends on our ability to notice, and our willingness to engage towards humanity and tolerance.

Our society in Germany faces a great challenge but shows also its great capacities. We see gratefully the general readiness to assist in so many ways for the people who come. Hundreds of thousand of volunteers, from churches, civil society, public and political life are contributing to creating a culture of welcome. They help to ensure that refugees are received and accommodated humanely and without delay. In this huge efforts, some say this is the biggest civil movement we ever had in Germany, we give an example for humanity in our society. For us as Christians that is not an option, it's a Christian obligation to do so. We owe the people our diaconal work. Diakonia is central to what it means to be the Church. Diakonia is not an option but an essential part of discipleship.

The thermostat in much contemporary Western Church life is set to comfort and individual feelings. Give me a cosy spiritual mood. It is a mentally wellness-program.



We now that is not enough. Diakonia is not a proof for our spirituality, it is one of the inner cores. Spirituality is not an evidence for our diaconal work, it is the innermost core. When I listen to you in our debates talking about the future in your country, I sometimes remember a short saying, which I read on a calendar a recently. Don't burden God with all your problems. Tell yours problems from the power and strength of God. In a word from Nelson Mandela.

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?

Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God.

Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone.

And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

I want to bolster you up, me up, because we know the world is still unhealed. Who could forget as we worship here tonight in security the suffering of Christians on other places in this country or in middle east. The world of God is not built on **blood taken** but on the **blood which flowed** from Jesus Christ on the cross. There is no restored and healed world without personal sacrifice. Only if we commit ourselves to the way of the cross will we avoid creating just a new variation on the old imperial theme.



We live at a time of great promise and at the same time peril. Shall we develop in time the wisdom to use the power given to the human race as a result of the knowledge we have acquired of how to split the atom and manipulate the genetic code? The tectonic plates of global power are shifting and we need to navigate into a new multi-polar world. In this time of promise and peril the challenge for those who celebrate Christ is to obey his command to love and to pray down the Kingdom into the here and now.

All of us have a contribution to make to a Kingdom which contains the promise of a wider and wider us, in a world that is always tempted to divide human beings into us and them, like we realising in your country new tendencies from some groups and movements and parties. In Christ there is no East or West; no Jew or Greek, there even is no Muslim and no Hindu.

The Kingdom promises a wider and wider us but also a deeper and deeper now. Christians have rich memories of the faithfulness of God and his power to defeat the powers of evil. We have an understanding of his passion for justice for all people and for the whole creation. A clear vision of the Kingdom can exert a gravitational pull on the present and transform the here and now. That is the deeper sense of the passage, we read in St. Matthew tonight.

A wider us; a deeper now; and lastly what we can taste and see in the lives of all those who have truly turned to Christ, a better good life. We can rejoice that in our own time so many people have been lifted out of poverty as it is defined by the UN in the Millennium Development Goals. But Christ who borrowed a donkey to enter Jerusalem; ate his last meal with his friends in a borrowed room and was even laid in someone else's tomb teaches us that happiness and the good life does not come from having more and more things, --- but in being richer in relationships with God and with our neighbours. I admired the technique of one shopkeeper who called out to me "Come into my shop and buy what you did not know you needed." It is a good line but it reveals the absurdity of much of our getting and spending when so many others lack



basic food and shelter.

A wider us; a deeper now and a better good life.

The challenge is to work together with a new confidence in Jesus Christ in whom there is no East or West. He is God's plan for the spiritual evolution of the human race in this new axial age. Lets walk together the path into this age. Here and in eternity.

Amen