

Ökumenischer Gottesdienst anlässlich des 60. Jahrestages der Zerstörung von Dresden – 13. Februar 2005, 20:30 Uhr, Kreuzkirche Dresden

Predigt von Landesbischof Jochen Bohl

“Therefore the son of God appeared, that he may destroy the devil’s work“.
1.Joh.3,8b

Dear parish,

on this 60th anniversary of the destruction of the city of Dresden we are commemorating the terrible events of those nights and the nameless horror inherent in them, as well as the horror of those years having preceded them.

When war returned to Germany and to our cities millions of people had, already become victims of it. “Never before have so many human lives been extinguished, so many cities been destroyed and whole strips of land been devastated through the collapse of an empire.” (J. Fest) We are commemorating the dead; we are bowing to the misery they had to bear, to the mercilessness of their way of dying. The mourning, in which survivors, among them our fellow citizens, all over the world have painfully been involved until today, touches our hearts.

Never before did a period of time have to suffer from such an excess of violence as it had been presented by World War II. It was an outbreak of barbarism, an obsessed delivery to the powers of death to an extent never known before. The first half of the century gives us more than only an idea of the power and dimension of the evil threatening life.

The slogan for the week beginning today talks about the devil’s work

– that is a language seeming strange to many contemporaries. But it concentrates the event of that time: Nazi Germany had delivered itself to the evil, assuming in a blinded manner to be able to reach their own aims and interests through the use of boundless violence. Finally it had turned into a senseless rage, destroying life, the country and the cities as a consequence of delivering oneself to the evil in its absolute form, using the language of the Bible, to the devil’s work.

So we have lived in peace for 60 years. That has never existed before in the history of our country. No generation before had been gifted with protection against the scourge of war for such a long time. Furthermore, we may live in accordance with all our neighbours regarding the aims that have to be reached, indeed in solidarity becoming deeper and deeper within the European Union. There are no obvious conflicts which could change this fortunate condition. Europe at enmity and wounded, found its way to the anticipated reconciliation, to living together in the spirit of peace.

By that the wounds from war have vanished. But they left scars, causing pain from time to time. So many people, still mourning for their dear departed who they could not live anymore, feel this spirit .

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The one who looks at the face of the city of Dresden will see that there as well most of the wounds are closed. However, some scars have leaped to the eye till today; there are still areas lying wasted and blank. But many injuries have been healed. In this way the simple pattern, our Kreuzkirche has got 10 years after the destruction – it was consecrated 50 years ago today – has helped an uncountable mass of people to have a particular, intimate relation to the preached word of God. The risen Frauenkirche shows the spirit of reconciliation coming from the overwhelming power of the gospel which is going to be preached in it. Thus, we may solemnize this day very gratefully – that we live in peace and that reconciliation became possible. – God has gifted us to a great extent.

Unfortunately, there are some side effects of this day having disturbed our commemoration. From the margins of the political spectrum we had to hear paroles that through their devious blindness make even those dangers occur which never can and never must be considered as banned because they show the power of the evil over human life. I remind you that millions of people had already become victims of war when it returned from Coventry and Rotterdam, from Lidice and Auschwitz back to Germany and Dresden. Viktor Klemperer’s diaries remind us that murdering the Jews and the felonious war are closely connected with each other, two sides of the shield. We know why it was necessary and deemed proper to overpower Nazi-Germany and we have been shocked until today by the price this necessity demanded.

The one who refuses to accept responsibility for his own history denies the great and good aim of reconciliation. The one who, instead calculating and full of hatred, regards the others brings the precondition for every good life beyond our reach

– he provokes new mischief and endangers peace; he pioneers for the evil.

The others have to be told: taking a mourning person his or her right of tears away, means neglecting human needs for love. It is the hostile refusal of the basic commandments of humanity. And the freedom of adolescence is no excuse for it.

The extremists' shouting expresses new blindness, to say something at least. They remind us that we need orientation for our life helping us not to be lost, to be delivered to evil powers. They remind us that we cannot live without clinging to the belief, carrying peace and good life.

There, dear parish, lies the great challenge of our time, obviously offering so many possibilities of forming life to all people as they like it.

We have never had so much freedom – but how can we realize it without endangering ourselves?

What is the good deserving our effort and to commit ourselves to anything? How can we stand the evil – within ourselves and in the world? We know indeed that peace does not simply happen– something which, so to say, would come over us without our own effort. On the contrary, life in peace is not possible without the will and the acceptance to train the heart, the senses and the will in peaceableness again and again.

Peace needs a certain attitude and a certain understanding of life we are appointed to. Peace needs people orienting by the brightness of life and the acceptance of reconciliation resulting from that. The Bible with its austere, realistic view at the human being, teaches us that we ourselves are only partially capable to do it.

“Therefore the son of God appeared, that he may destroy the devil's work“.

We hear that the appearance of God's son is related to the condition of our world, related to creation: Christ came because of the evil existing on earth –

for that this power is broken and cannot deflate us. The crucified and risen helps us to stand it; since we are always in danger of delivering ourselves to the evil. Commemorating the horror of war, we see what people are able to commit to each other – and we can recognize that our life is endangered by the same reasons again at any time: by ourselves, our lack of peaceableness and our failure in solving the tasks posed through life.

On the contrary, God's promise is that not war, not violence, not hatred or retaliation should be there. But this is the holy will of God. People shall meet each other with the spirit of reconciliation and charity. The one who admits to his guilt may experience mercy. We need not fight for life, but we may share the love of God and feel salvaged there. We do not have to manage life on our own but we can go the way of peace together. There shall be no war but peace. God himself wants that this comes true, to touch our heart. He himself shows us the way we can go – and helps us going there. Jesus said the peaceables are blessed, that they will win life, the entire and real life because they will be named children of God. This is a wonderful promise we can trust through or belief. By that we win good life, only by that.

Dear parish, we could hear from God's gift – that Jesus Christ has come to heal our life full of danger. We gratefully look at his reconciliation work among us connecting us with former enemies, with Christians crossing all borders. Thus we know his mission: living peacefully and encouraging each other to go on the way of peace. All Christians share this responsibility wherever they live. We as the parish of Jesus Christ in Dresden, facing a history of blindness and acts of violence, but also of decampment and healing, want to bear witness of our Lord: to live in reconciliation. That is our mission.