

Sermon on 15.05.2011 at Hannover International Worship, John 16:16-23a

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters!

Do you have questions in your mind? What would you ask if Jesus came just now and walked in a visible way among us? I am sure we all have dozens of questions in our minds. The shape of our head itself is “a Question mark” (?). Human beings need clarifications, rationalization and answers in their lives. Sometimes we all have questions that are difficult to answer.

In our sermon text of today, taken from John 16, 16-23a, we read a story about the farewell speech of Jesus that confused the disciples. His speech created a question in their minds and they wanted to ask. Jesus knew the confusion and their intention, and gave clarification. Let us read the story once again. Jesus says: **“A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me.’ Some of His disciples then said to one another, ‘What is this thing He is telling us,We do not know what He is talking about. Jesus knew that they wished to question Him and He said to them, ‘Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me’?”**

The speech of Jesus seemed to be contradictory to the disciples and confused them. Their confusion was not only because of the contradiction of the words, but it also contradicted their expectation. The Disciples expected Jesus to liberate Israel from colony and become their ruler. Contrary to this, Jesus says he will depart.

When we read this chapter from the beginning, their confusion is somewhat understandable, because in chapter 16 verse 10, we read Jesus saying He is going to the Father and they will not see Him any longer. And in verse 17 he says they will see Him, and it won't be long. What does this all mean?

Quite simply, Jesus is saying that His time on earth is drawing to a conclusion. His disciples will only see Him for another few hours. But in three days, they will see Him again when He rises from the dead.

Jesus also talks to His disciples about the challenges that will await them after His departure. He offers an essential reminder that the resurrection is a life-changing truth that empowers them.

Dear brothers and sisters!

Do we believe that the existing human sufferings will end someday?

It is not easy to preach on this text, especially at this time when the sufferings of this world became so wide and complicated. I do not have sometimes words to explain the sufferings I hear and see. They sometimes shake my faith. As I began to think on which text I am going to preach, (on the 18th of April 2011), I got a very disturbing film taken from Youtube internet page and sent by "*Copten ohne Grenze*". The film warns the under age children and people with heart disease not to watch. I could not believe my eyes when I watched the film. It was said that the video was taken in the Ivory Coast, (Elfenbeinküste in German). The film is very similar to the story of the Catacomb holocaust. I saw people being thrown into fire and others were watching when human beings were being burnt alive.

The Copten ohne Grenze say the Christians were burnt alive by Muslims. For me it is shocking to see human beings burnt alive whether they are Christians or

Muslims. Neither Muhammad nor Jesus approves this action. Still I have a question in my mind: “Why did God tolerate such happenings?” I often hear many “why” questions. Why did God allow the earthquake and Tsunami that devastated Japan killing nearly thirty thousand people last March? Why are evil persons successful and the innocent suffer? There are many why questions and we cannot give satisfactory answers. Jesus also asked His father: *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachtani?*” “*My God, My God why have you forsaken me?*” Mk.15:34.

There is no stupid question, but there is no easy answer to some questions. We may not understand why this world is becoming a cruel place, but our observations tell us that it is a cruel place. Evil people have success and good people suffer. Those who rise to the top in this world are often those who are best at stepping on others and using other people for their own advantage. Why is it that some people work very hard all day long but at the end of the day they hardly have enough money to buy a decent meal? Whereas other people don't have to work at all and yet they have so much money they don't even know what to do with it? Why are the poor kept where they are? Why do poorness and richness become like hereditary diseases inherited today? The world is a cruel place. The world is a place where evil often prevails, but thanks to God that is not the end. There is good news of hope.

Jesus says: **“Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy. Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to a child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world. Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you. In that day you will no longer ask me anything “(16:20-23a).**

The Bible is about 2000 years old but its message is relevant even today. Therefore, it deserves to be read. The sorrows of the disciples are simply human sorrows in this world. Jesus knew that the disciples would have sorrow. But he did not want them to be without hope. Therefore he told them, “***Your grief will turn to joy. Your grief would not prevail***”. To help the disciples understand, he compares the sufferings that will come with that of the ***pain of a woman in child birth***.

I find this illustration to be the best picture that explains the reality of life here on earth. Men may not understand this pain, but women do explain that it is the most painful one. The Oromo women give the meaningful names to their children in order to explain their birth pain and joy after. Some of these names that explain the birth pain and joy are: “***Jiraataa***” meaning he lives, “***Jiraattuu***”, meaning she lives, “***Gammachuu***”, meaning Joy. Both mother and child are alive therefore the mother, the husband, the relatives and all friends have endless joy. In order to have a joy by having a child, a woman has to go through this suffering.

In this world there is no way to escape from suffering and sorrow. The degree could vary but everybody goes through the journey of trouble on this earth. The good news for Christians is that we believe in the victory over sorrow. ***Without Good Friday, there is no Easter Sunday***. The sorrow of Jesus on the cross was turned to Joy on the day of resurrection. Death had no power over Jesus. Evil had no power over him. Pontius Pilate had no power over him.

Likewise, the suffering we see or experience will be someday over. Some day we will overcome. The time of war will be changed to the time of peace. But we need to believe and work for peace.

I know it is not easy to change the evil of this world to good, but I believe it is possible to change it if we begin from our selves. ***We need to believe that our times of trouble are our times of trust.*** The time of our trouble seems to be unapproachable, then our pride begins to disappear and we begin to depend on God, who is bigger than our problem. That is what I mean by our time of trouble is our time of trust. If we trust, we have hope and joy.

The Joy that Jesus gives is for you and for me. When we lose sight of Jesus, it seems to us that evil forces prevail in this world. But when we fix our eyes on the resurrected Jesus, we have hope and then we realize that the evil of this world has no power over us. This is the good news that we read in this text. At the end I would like to summarize our text with three important messages it contains.

1. Evil forces have been defeated. The apostle Paul says in Col 2:15:

“Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” When we see evil things of today, when we see what the dictators are doing in Africa and elsewhere today, when we see what the terrorists do every day, we see only killing and death. These dictators and the terrorists are the same because they are agents of devil. The Bible says the devil is a killer. But the Killers have no power over human beings; some day truth and peace prevail. The source of killing, the devil is already defeated by Jesus Christ.

2. Victory over evil comes through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The evil forces are active in this world in a very complicated way. It can be easy to observe the evil forces in someone else, but very difficult to see how they work within us. The moment we become jealous, the moment we think of hating someone who has different ideas from ours, is the moment the evil starts to work within us. The moment we think of revenge, the moment we plan to destroy someone’s life is the time evil is working within us.

Contrary to this, the moment we respect different ideas, the moment we respect every person's dignity is the moment the gift of Holy Spirit is working within us. The Holy Spirit will teach us to see the other person through the lens of Jesus. The Holy Spirit will teach us to love, to forgive and to accept forgiveness. The Holy Spirit will remind us that evil will not prevail. The Holy Spirit will teach us to break the chains of evil. The Holy Spirit will show us the face of Jesus.

3. **The Time will come when there will be no more question.** One day Jesus will come so that we can see him with our eyes, on a day when we will not have to ask him anything. Then he will make everything new, and there will no longer be any evil in the world. At that time "there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev 21:4). Then we will be filled with great Joy that nobody takes away from us. **May God help us to see that day! Amen.**