

HANNOVER INTERNATIONAL WORSHIP

16 July, 2017 11.30 Petri Church

Order of Service

Music

Welcome

Hymn The summer days are come again

Prayer Psalm 118

Reading Acts 17, 22-25, 27-28, 30-32

Hymn Immortal, Invisible

Reading Colossians 3, 1 - 4

Apostles' Creed

Hymn Open my eyes

Sermon Pastor Dr Vera Pabst, Bokeloh

Hymn To God be the glory

Announcements

Hymn All things bright and beautiful

Prayer of intercession

Hymn The Lord bless us and keep us

Blessing

**Go in peace: The blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
be upon you and remain with you always**

Music

Psalm 118, 1, 14 - 29

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.

The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.

Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous:
"The Lord's right hand has done mighty things!"

The Lord's right hand is lifted high; the Lord's right hand has done mighty things!"

I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done.

The Lord has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death.

Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to the Lord.

This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter.

I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.

The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone;

The Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

O Lord, save us; O Lord, grant us success.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we bless you.

The Lord is God, and he has made his light shine upon us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.

You are my God, and I will give thanks; you are my God, and I will exalt you.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.

Acts 17, 22-25, 27-28, 30-32

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. God did this so that men would seek him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead." When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject."

Colossians 3, 1- 4

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth;
And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord:
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead and buried,
he descended into hell;
the third day he rose from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from there shall he come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Datum: Predigt für den 16/07/2017
Ort: Ev.-luth. Petrikerche, Hannover
Text: Colossians 3,1-4
Thema: Resurrection – the motivation for life?

Grace and peace to you from God our Father. (Col 1.2b).

A room for Paul – fun and chocolates – the best choice in town – to be my own boss – to own the best horse in the stables ...

“Everyone has got something that motivates them” – that is my rough translation of the slogan „Jeder Mensch hat etwas, das ihn antreibt.“ For a number of years the Volksbanken and Raiffeisenbanken have been advertising their products with that motto. In 2008, an agency called HEIMAT, based in Berlin, developed the campaign in such a successful way that the photos are still used on posters, on the ATM screen, and the videos online. The personal motivation of people is at the centre of the short clips and the photos so that the origin of the campaign becomes obvious only at the end of the clip, when the logo and the motto are presented: ‘Everyone has got something that motivates them’/ „Jeder Mensch hat etwas, das ihn antreibt.“

The head of a family-run company introduces his business. He creates and secures jobs locally, but sells globally. The organizer of a boat race raves about the feeling of companionship on the weekend of the race. A postwoman introduces her aid project in Ghana. Through the foundation of kindergartens and schools the project enables people to stay home, gain education for themselves

and their families, so that they don’t have to risk their lives on their way to their “land of dreams” – Europe.

Not monetary goals, but deeper values are at the heart of the campaign: goals in life worth living for, presented by people who could well be our next-door neighbours. The portraits create such an authentic impression as they are filmed with hand-held cameras, the main characters speak with a local accent and use colloquial phrases. As the Volksbanken und Raiffeisenbanken explain on their homepage: it is an emotional documentary of personal desires and goals. (Es „ist eine emotionale Dokumentation von persönlichen Wünschen und Zielen.“)

If you were asked today to define what is of utmost importance to you, if you would be given the opportunity to create such a three-minute spot, what would you say? What is it that motivates you in life? How would you present it in such an advertisement? What location would you choose to best express your goal in life? “Everyone has got something that motivates them.” What is your motivation? What do you want to achieve in life?

There is a song that plays quietly in the background. The title of the song is “Hungry heart”. Only the chorus is presented so that you can actually make out the words: 'Tell me, how far, how far, how far, how far, will you go for your goals? - „Sag mir wie weit, wie weit, wie weit, wie weit wirst Du gehen.“ Underlying the peaceful, picturesque pictures, it subtly implies that it can be costly to us to invest in our aim for our life. “Everyone has got something that motivates them”/ „Jeder Mensch hat etwas, das ihn antreibt.“

If Paul and his co-workers had been given the opportunity to take part in that campaign, they would have had a clear answer.

In the letter to the Christians in Colossae they have presented their aim in a brief and precise way, but perhaps not as easily understood as in such a commercial of today.

I will read again from chapter 3: “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” (Col 3,1-4)

Paul and his co-workers address the Christians in Colossae to advertise the aim of Christ in that area of Asia Minor. The apostle has not been to that region, located in today’s Turkey. Still, he is burdened to address that congregation. One of his co-workers, Epaphras, is from Colossae, and paid Paul a visit when he was in jail in Ephesus, telling him all about the current situation in his home church. A new religious philosophical movement was attracting more and more followers from amongst the Christians. Concepts from the Jewish faith and the philosophy of Plato were apparently mingled in such a convincing way that the new belief appealed to many. Not an unlikely situation in a city that was known for the international trade routes passing through it, and for its famous fashion industry.

So, confusion had arisen as to whether the Jewish rules should be kept. For example: Do Christians need to be circumcised? Should Christians keep specific holy days? Are Christians allowed

to eat everything, or do they have to keep food laws? The followers of the new movement are motivated by the idea that they will be thus empowered to reach higher steps of faith, finally enabling them to enter the highest level, the realm in which Christ reigns. This goal – to one day be in Jesus Christ’s world – is what motivates them in this life. Therefore, they are willing to forsake all their material belongings, because they consider them an obstacle to their immaterial soul.

This is not a long walk to freedom [Aber dieser Weg macht nicht frei,] but leads to a prison of rules and regulations. This is Paul’s own experience and concern. They have lost the core value of the Christian faith, the hope and the liberty that it holds.

Therefore, he prays for them as he assures them in the opening lines of his letter. Then he begins to lay out his argument (Col 1,12-2,23) so that they can follow it through, and understand what matters in the Christian faith. And before he sets out to explain the practical consequences in the second part of his letter (Col 3,5-4,6) he wrote these four verses as a summary and transition. “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” (Col 3,1-4)

It is only in this passage, the core paragraph of the letter, that Paul uses the term “resurrection”. Previously, he has used the word “hope” (1,5.23) to describe the Christian motivation: To know we

have been raised with Christ has consequences for our own aims in life. In order to explain the reality of the resurrection, Paul makes a difference between “the things above” and “earthly things”: Christians have already been raised with Christ, but we don’t experience that reality right now.

So, when the Apostle talks about “the things above” and “the earthly things”, it is not a geographical description, nowhere you could locate on a map, but is meant in contrast to the “here and now” with the “things to come”. It is similar to how parents explain to their children that grandma has passed away and is now in heaven with God. And we express the same idea when we use biblical wording and pray to “Our Father in Heaven”, and confess in the Apostle’s Creed using the words of this letter to the Colossians: “*he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.*”

That brings us back to the question I asked at the beginning of my sermon: What is your motivation? What do you want to achieve in this life? What influences you when you have to make decisions?

In contrast to the aims and goals that are presented in the advertisement of the Volks- und Raiffeisenbanken, that can be reached over and over again, or will be fulfilled one day in the future, the aim Paul describes has already been fully and finally and completely accomplished: it is simply out of reach right now.

It is similar to a birthday present for child. The child knows that the parents have bought the present already. However, it still sits on the shelf in the parents’ bedroom until the actual birthday. Until that birthday comes, the child cannot play with that toy, but can look

forward to it. And when classmates tease him for bragging about owning the toy, the child does not have to be jealous or sad, for he is assured that he will be able to hold the present soon and play with it in the near future. In that way, the everyday life of that child has been changed because the child knows about the present on the shelf – waiting to be taken possession of.

Another explanation that I learned from a confirmand the other week is that to believe in the resurrection today is like knowing that the family holiday to a foreign country has already been booked. Firstly, I can already search the internet, read travel books, and gather all the available information about the holiday destination. However, I will only know what it feels like once we have landed, got off the plane, feel the air, see the surroundings with my own eyes and create my own impressions. Only then will I begin to understand what life is like there. Secondly, since I have been given all the relevant information about my holiday destination by my travel agent, I can already start preparing for the trip: buy a new camera or new equipment and try it out, buy new hiking boots and start breaking them in by going for walks, maybe start dieting, working on that elusive bikini figure ... And finally, if I have a bad day at school or at work, I can start counting the days until the day of departure, and begin to smile. In the midst of my everyday life here, I begin to look forward to my holiday there.

My resurrection is not an object I own right now, it is not an experience that I have already gained. God, however, is the guarantee, that it *will* happen one day, for He has raised Christ from the dead: resurrection and everlasting life is God’s goal for us.

To achieve that goal for us cost him the suffering and the death of His own Son. That's how far, how far, how far, how far, how far, he went to achieve His goal for us.

All those who have been baptised into Christ and have been united with him, who have died with him, will be raised with Him and live with Him in His realms – in His time.

God's faithfulness validates our hope in the resurrection. There are no terms and conditions in the small print. We are free to walk this road to our eternal freedom.

That's why, argues Paul, that our hope in the resurrection will change how we approach our everyday life here and now, and will shape our thinking and the setting of our goals. Once I come to terms with the understanding, that everything that I aspire to in this world will be surpassed by everything that awaits me in the world to come, all my current goals and aims become temporary in the light of eternity, and I am set free to make decisions with my ultimate goal in mind.

Resurrection as my aim in life, however, is no excuse to not take my everyday life seriously anymore. 'To be so heavenly-minded but of no earthly good'- is not an attitude encouraged in the Bible. Unlike people whose lives revolve around sport or holidays, and who live from weekend to weekend, holiday to holiday, we are called as Christians to use our time here to prepare ourselves and others for the life to come.

In contrast to the beliefs in Colossae and the surrounding areas, Paul emphasises the privilege we have to invest our lives into something that has an eternal interest rate in our favour. The way

was made open for us through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. Not just for me, but for all of us. Therefore, we have a lasting responsibility to share that hope with our family, friends and neighbours in this world about this other, better world through our words and deeds.

"Everyone has got something that motivates them". „Jeder Mensch hat etwas, das ihn antreibt.“ For us as Christians, it is the resurrection. Will that hope make a difference in the way you spend your money, your energy, your time? How far, how far, how far, how far will you go for that goal? How will that aim change your values, your perspective and your decision-making? What temporal distractions are you willing to give up in this life to ensure your investment in the next world is not compromised?

It would be great to hear from you about how you would present your personal motivation and your private goal as an advert.

The peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Hymn: To God be the glory