

HANNOVER INTERNATIONAL WORSHIP

March 19th, 2023 11.30 Petri Church Hannover

Order of Service

Music

Welcome

Hymn **In Christ there is no East or West**

Psalm 69,2-4.8-10.14.21f.30

Prayer

Music ***CHUSSNI BIKURBI ELBIKA***

Reading Epistle: Phil 2, 5-11

Hymn ***MUSTAHIKI KULLALMAGDI JA JESUA***

Reading Gospel: John 12,12-19

The Apostles' Creed

Hymn **All glory, laud and honor**

Sermon Dr. Vera Christina Pabst, Hannover/ Hildesheim

Hymn **How great is our God**

Announcements

Hymn **Father God, I wonder how I managed to exist**

Prayer of intercession

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn **The Lord bless us and keep us**

Blessing

Hymn **Bless the Lord O my soul**

John 12,12-19

The Triumphal Entry

12 The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.

13 So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!"

14 And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, 15 "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!"

16 His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.

17 The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness.

18 The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign.

19 So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him."

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Look, the world has gone after him.” (John 12,19) The closing words of today’s gospel reading kept ringing in my ears, after we had discussed the passage at length at our previous course module of the Interkulturelle Lektorenkurs in Springe. Teaching preaching opens new perspectives on well-known texts. So let me share with you an insight I gained from our discussion: the role of the crowd.

“Look, the world has gone after him.” (John 12,19) The words originally uttered out of safety concerns, today they are a reason to give thanks and to rejoice. About 2000 years later the good news of Jesus Christ has entered many cities and countries around the globe. The Interkulturelle Lektorenkurs and our congregation gathered here at Hanover International Worship today, they are proof of the fact that the world has gone after HIM. We are resembling the world with our different backgrounds and nationalities. Look around you, isn’t it wonderful that there are so many faces from various walks of life?

“Look, the world has gone after him.” (John 12,19) Let me take you back to Jerusalem and the surrounding area to find out more what lead to such a statement in the first place:

The city is crowded with Passover Pilgrims. Several hundred thousands of them fill the streets and places of Jerusalem in order to celebrate. They’ve gathered from all over the country and beyond to commemorate how the Angel of the LORD had passed over the homes of the Hebrews. They remember how He had spared their ancestors’ offspring and, thereby, granted them a future as HIS people.

The Passover liturgy speaks of freedom for HIS people, but they find themselves still oppressed – another Passover celebration under the Roman rulers: Who will finally set them free? With the traditional readings in their ears, there is expectation in the air. *Under such political circumstances the crowd is a dangerous sight in the eyes of those who oversee law and order.*

The village of Bethany is only half an hour away from the capital. It is safer and more convenient for Jesus and his followers to stay there for the Festive Season. In Bethany they have friends who welcome them, Mary, Martha and their brother Lazarus. Here he can withdraw from the attention of the masses with all their diverse expectations. Amongst his close friends and followers he can rest from the days’ demands, the cheering crowd, the tricky questions of the different leaders and teachers, the constant pressure on him. Every night they return to Bethany. It is their retreat in these turbulent times. It is in Bethany where Jesus and his disciples feel at home – and safe. *A pressing crowd can be threatening for the one who draws the attention.*

And it wasn’t long ago that, sadly enough, Lazarus had fallen ill. His sisters had sent for help. Their friend, however, did not make it in time. Upon his arrival Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. In their grief, both of his sisters, first Martha, then Mary, meet Jesus blaming him for his absence. They cannot hide their disappointment. And even a member of the weeping crowd, accompanying them, was overheard accusing Jesus: “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” (John 11,37) If there are many you can be more courageous, for you

can slip away. It will be difficult to identify you and take you up on what you say out loud. *A moving crowd can be a safe space to speak your mind more openly.*

It took a prayer to His heavenly Father and a loud command that every bystander could overhear for Lazarus to come out of the tomb – alive – the strips of linen still around his body, the cloth still around his face, grave clothes of the dead on a walking man. What a spectacular sight, what a significant sign!

Whom of you would have not been interested in meeting, or at least going to see such a man who can do such miracle? So when there is an opportunity and you hear that this Jesus is in town, would you not go and greet him?

It does not need Instagram or WhatsApp or any other provider. According to the Gospel of John, the social media of their day works very efficiently. Whatever (Festive) preparations they had originally planned for that day, they now have a new agenda. It takes a rumour to get them moving out of town, eastwards so that they can welcome him when he arrives from Bethany that day. *It only takes a rumour to steer a crowd.*

There they are next to the road: Were they there out of conviction because they had been eyewitnesses of Lazarus' resurrection? Were they there out of curiosity because they had heard so much about him? Were they there out of fear because they did not want to disappoint their neighbour? You better be on the right side of history when the revolution is about to start, and the long-awaited king is about to come... The Gospel of John does not tell us about their individual

motives. *There are many people who gather for their very own reasons, but they form one crowd.*

One of them must have started to break off a branch of a palm tree, the sign of victory and honour. Another one of them started to shout "Hosanna", an expression of praise and a plea for help and salvation at the same time. Another one again takes the idea up, for he remembers the Scriptures and starts reciting the psalms (Ps 118,25f). Blessings are showered up the one who is about to come. It is a royal welcome indeed! As various as their motives are, all in all, *the crowd has come to the same conclusion: They are expecting the King of Israel to arrive.*

And now, with all the pomp and circumstances, ... I cannot imagine but of an expression of disappointment on the face of the first one who discovers the man at the end of the road. It is a rider drawing near, BUT on a donkey. Just imagine the astonishment, had one of the movie stars arrived at the Oscar's in a battered taxi the other week! Jesus chooses the "cheapest mode of transport" of his time for his entry into the capital. In hindsight, it is easy to quote Scripture and make it sound as if it was the obvious choice. For the first eye witnesses it must have been weird, rather ridiculous. What a clash of expectations! How can a man on a donkey deal with an army of oppressors? Interestingly enough, there is no note in this passage of the people leaving. *A disappointed crowd can turn into a rioting mob – out of control.*

It is here that the focus of today's passage is taken away from the crowd and narrows in on the disciples for the first time. We have no indication whether they had followed behind Jesus riding on the donkey. Maybe they had mingled in and become part of the crowd by

the roadside – just as Peter did two days later to follow his Master into the high priest’s court yard. The only aspect we are told is that Jesus puzzles the people, even his close friends who thought they had known him and his mission.

The Gospel of John though then recommends the crowd who was with them when he raised Lazarus from the dead for their understanding of Jesus’ kingship. It is them who grasp the good news and continue to spread the word of the king who did not come to humble his people, but to humble himself, of the king who did not come to take life, but to give life, of the king who did not come to oppress but to give freedom – ultimate freedom from everything that binds life – even death!

As eyewitnesses of Lazarus’ resurrection and Jesus’ humble entry into the capital they share their experience with the pilgrims from all over the country and beyond who have gathered for the Festive Season in Jerusalem. On this occasion, it is not the disciples’ doing, but this crowd’s that leads to the statement of concern: “Look how the whole world has gone after him.” (John 12,19)

Yes, I am fully aware that it is a crowd that will later mock him as King of the Jews and demand Jesus’ crucifixion. However, it is exactly this aspect that leads me to my conclusion of today’s sermon:

Firstly, where had I been if I had spent the Festive Season in Jerusalem? Part of the crowd? With which intention and expectations of Jesus? Would I have stood by him, even if he had disappointed my image of him and my idea of his mission, my hopes and dreams?

Secondly, I want to join in the crowd’s shouts of “Hosanna”, the expression of praise and the plea for help and salvation at the same time.

I want to shout Hosanna to the King for those who have the courage to take to the streets and form a crowd to oppose oppression. Hosanna – O Lord save us.

I want to shout Hosanna to the King for those who have the audacity to raise their voice and speak their mind – even in the face of danger. Hosanna – O Lord save us.

I want to shout Hosanna to the King for those who are disappointed and frustrated as their hopes and dreams have been shattered by political systems. Hosanna – O Lord save us.

I want to shout Hosanna to the King for those who are in leadership positions but seek not the good of their people. Hosanna – O Lord save us....

Hosanna – O Lord save us. Even though I might feel lonely at times in my praying and pleading, I know that we are many raising our voices to the King, an invisible crowd of Christians on every continent and in every nation– for “Look, the world has gone after HIM.”

Hosanna – O Lord save us. 2000 years later, I dream of the plea for help and salvation ringing out around the world to the King who will come again to save us from everything that binds us and to raise us from the dead for good.

Until then, may the peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our King. **Amen.**