



## Advent Homilies KSG Berlin 2020

### **ERWARTUNGEN: 1. Hoffnungen (Hope)**

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Dear brothers and sisters,

I would like to explore with you the different dimensions of hope, which is the topic of today's sermon. First of all it's a feeling, which all of you – hopefully – know! This feeling is quite positive and relates to small things, like the hope to get the bus – and major issues, like the hope to survive a severe illness. Hope is something which is good for me. It warms my heart and helps to go through difficult situations.

Hope is an important aspect of our Advent time. In today's Gospel Jesus tells about servants who wait for their Lord to come back. Are they full of hope? Maybe not, if they consider themselves only as being subordinated. Then we speak about fear! As a Christian I read this Gospel in a different way. For me these servants are waiting for their Lord because they are missing him. Because they need them. And the power inside their hearts is hope! Hope is the energy which motivates them to keep watching and to expect more than the visible!

#### **Disappointment**

Hope has an antagonist. Because we know that our hope can fail! We call this antagonist "disappointment". And I am sure that all of you already experienced this negative feeling! It happens when we count on someone and he just fails! It's deeply frustrating, because it questions our very existence!

For sure, it depends also from our character. There are people full of optimism who seem not to care if something happens or not. In Cologne there is a phrase which expresses this attitude: "Et hätt noch immer jot jejang", which means "It still went well." Usually it's

good to have some friends who help us to keep hope alive. Although sometimes they can be annoying, if they close their eyes and don't want to see reality.

The contrary are people who always see the bad. Who are worried, who have concerns but with no positive and constructive approach. When I am in a bad mood I love to approach people like that because they confirm my own negativity. In my community they call me sometimes "Kassandra" which is a mythological figure who always predicted bad things. If we have this state of mind, hope seems to be naive, or childish or just not reasonable.

The Christian faith is all about hope! You know the trias "faith, hope, love" which is taken from the letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians. These three things are deeply connected, and none of these virtues can be practiced without the others. Faith is believing in God, and love is a sentiment which connects us to our neighbor and to God. But hope is something which opens a temporal dimension. It's about future. We can only have hope if we believe in future! I am deeply convinced, that the very idea of "hope" has a judeo-christian background!<sup>1</sup> It's different from other religions or ideas, like buddhims which is more statical.

### **Secular transformation of hope**

It's interesting to know, that the christian concept of hope "migrated" somehow outside christianism and become secular! The most famous secularized form of "hope" can be found in ... marxism! You know that marxism considered himself as an objective science, and that the development of modern societies would follow scientific rules according to an inner logic. Revolution was considered a scientific necessity! The owners of the capital, the bourgeoisie, are destined to be defeated by the working class. Knowing about this future would give to the labouring class the power to proclaim revolution, even with violence, and to change the present, and by that the future. This logic made communism so powerful. People believed in the promise of a better world, in the possibility to change *this* reality by "my hands".

Communism can be understood as a secularized religion of salvation! That's why it was so hard when in the ninetens the communist block just collapsed. Among the older people here in Prenzlauer Berg, where our KSG is located, there are many who believed in communism. They had put all their hope into that ideology. You can imagine how frustrating it was – for some – when the wall was teared down. Not only that their

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<sup>1</sup> You might know Ernst Bloch, a German philosopher who migrated into the United States during World War II. He wrote his principle oeuvre: "Principles of hope". If you are interested in a deeper understanding, you should read this more then 1000 pages book. He shows from different point of views that hope is a strong changing power which should not be underestimated.

believes and hopes just failed... In their point of view, it was replaced by a primitive logic of consumism and market. And they were not completely wrong.

### **The Judeo-Christian concept of history and time**

What is the Christian understanding of hope. First of all: Our christian concept of time, of history, of future is deeply rooted in judaism. We cannot understand Christian faith without considering the faith of the judaism. The whole Old Testament is about an expectation: The Jews were waiting – and are still waiting – for the Messiah. This Messiah had different aspects: He was somehow a political figure which would restore the power of the ancient kingdom. For others this Messiah is more a spiritual reality: A messenger from God who would restore the world as he was created: Without war and death, without pain and sorrow. Till nowadays the Jews keep this faith in expecting the Messiah.

The Christians believe that this Messiah already came: Jesus! And we are going to celebrate on Christmas his coming. We believe that through Christ God himself came to the World. And we recognize in Jesus God. This is why Christian and Jewish religion differ in this two particular points: Jews don't believe that the Messiah already came. They are still waiting for him. And they don't believe *at all*, that God would have shown himself by incarnating in a human being.

### **A deep misunderstanding**

If God already showed up himself: Does it mean, that christians do not have any need for hope? In my point of view this would be a deep spiritual misunderstanding. It's the case when Christians believe that they "own" God. They make him an object of their mind. But God is never an object!

In the New Testament the understanding of God's presence in our world is *dynamic*, not static. He came, but he is also gone. This is the meaning of the feast of Assumption (Himmelfahrt). He would not leave as alone, as he said before. But he is now present in a different way: This is the meaning of Pentecost, where he gave us the Holy Spirit. And it doesn't end here! We believe that Christ would come back again!

Christ is coming again! This is an aspect which is highly underestimated by all of us, me too! Nevertheless, we speak all the time about it! "We proclaim your Death, O Lord, / and profess your Resurrection / until you come again." (In German "...bis Du kommst in Herrlichkeit). And listen to all the official prayers I am going to pray in your name. It speaks always from Christ who would come again!

That means that we believe in his presence – in the sacraments, in our neighbour, in the poor and the needy. But in the meantime we know that we are still expecting the fullness of his presence. It's important to keep this aspect alive in our faith.

### **Christian “realism”**

Why? Because it's our way to be realistic about our world! We don't make it better as it is! This would be ideology! We acknowledge the absence of God's kingdom when we see in our days the lack of justice. When we see people suffering or being exploited. We know how this world created by God could be! From this knowledge we get strength and power to denounce any form of disfigurement and distortion of God's project. That's why in Christian prayer – following the Jewish tradition - we practice praise and thanksgiving, but also lamentation and plaint. Is not a kind of ungratefulness towards God, but the indignation that God is not yet fully present! That powers who are against the fullness of life are still acting in our world.

Let me explain this particular aspect of Christian spirituality from the opposite. If it is true, that Jesus is coming back, and if we do not consider this as a completely “spiritual” reality, but as something which has to do with my world, my reality and my experiences, then it means that all this “absence” of God is not only a reason for lament or sorrow, but the basis of new hope. Because we know that God's kingdom will come – as we pray “Thy Kingdom come”! It's just a matter of time and of our collaboration to make this happen. We see this world with different eyes: We see all the little signs, which indicate us, that our hope is not in vain, but something rooted first in our faith and in the meantime in reality and our perception of it! We see what we are missing, and we have a dream of how it could be.

### **Little sign of the coming of the Kingdom**

This is the meaning of the command in our Gospel today “Watch!” and be watchful! That means: Let us open our eyes for the hidden presence of God in our world! Ultimately, this is the reason why we can have hope. Because our Christian hope is not only something we “have to believe” despite our reality! The Christian hope gives us a different “Weltansicht” (Worldview): We see the seeds, we acknowledge the signs of the coming of God in the world.

But be aware: Hope cannot be imposed! On the contrary! Hope is spread, hope is shared, hope is received like an unexpected gift. And Christians should be champions of hope,

where others lost their hope! How often people envy us, because of our hope. But it's nothing negative. It's a duty to keep hope alive, especially for those who lost any hope!

We are preparing ourselves to the celebration of Christmas, the birth of Christ. But not only! We are preparing also his second coming which is the reason and power of our hope! Jesus will not leave this world as it is. He still has a project with us, it's our vision of a better future, which makes us act in our society and our personal lives!

I encourage you to care for your hope. To protect it so it can grow and be shared with others. Hope is a mission entrusted to all of us.