

Sermon KSG 19.06.2022

student sermon by Veronika Gräwe

*"There is neither Jewish nor Greek, there is neither enslaved nor free, there is neither male nor female: for all ye are one in the Messiah Jesus." (Gal 3:28)*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I'll start with a content note: the sermon will also be about queer hostility. If you are not comfortable with that right now, the sermon will last 10 to 12 minutes, you may feel free to leave the church for that long.

Dear brothers and sisters,

On 24 January, 125 Catholic people came out as queer, or as Hendrik Johannemann so aptly put it in the Third Synodal Assembly, 125 queer people came out as Catholic. The initiative was accompanied by a documentary on ARD, which documented the stories of individual queer Catholics under the title "As God created us".

In this sermon I would like to formulate a few thoughts on how we as Catholics can build a church without fear and how the Bible and tradition can strengthen us in this.

The ARD documentary "As God Created Us" ends with the phrase "Land of Freedom". Church as a land of freedom? A church of diversity? A church without fear? A utopia?! When I look at the reading of the Letter to the Galatians, a utopia in which binary gender concepts and gender no longer play a role does not seem so un-Christian. After all, the letter to the Galatians says: "There is neither Jewish nor Greek, there is neither enslaved nor free, there is neither male nor female: for all of you are one in Messiah Jesus." In the letter to the Galatians, this utopia of a more gender-equal state seems to have already begun. The New Testament scholar Ansgar Wucherpfennig speaks of a freedom impulse with regard to the baptismal theology of the Letter to the Galatians. Social differences that caused inequality in Paul's time lose their relevance with baptism. I am not going to do an in-depth historical-critical exegesis here. If you are interested in Paul's understanding of sexuality in its historical context, I recommend the book "Sexuality in Paul" by Ansgar Wucherpfennig.

Back to the Letter to the Galatians "there is not male and female" and in the continuation perhaps "there is not hetero nor homo, not cis nor trans"? Currently we use terms such as cis to describe people who identify with the gender ascribed to them at birth, as opposed to trans people who do not identify with this ascribed

gender, to name different experiences, marginalisations and discriminations. In the utopia of Galatians, these categories would, I suspect, be overcome.

A brief digression on the topic of identity politics: One way to distinguish between right-wing and progressive identity politics is in their objectives. While right-wing identity politics are about stabilising a certain identity and its dominance, progressive identity politics name identities in order to overcome associated forms of marginalisation and discrimination. The naming of identities here is thus aimed at overcoming these distinctions and the dominations and marginalisations that accompany them. So the goal of a church without fear should not be the stabilisation of opposites between hetero and homo, cis and trans, but a state in which these categories have lost their power to establish dominance and marginalisation.

Let us take a look at the first reading from the book of Zechariah. Here it is the lament, indeed the dirge, that is followed by the overcoming of a state of sin. Where Zechariah speaks of the one they pierced, from a Christian perspective looking at the Hebrew Bible, this pierced one can be read as Christ. The suffering Christ himself is portrayed differently in the history of piety: Sometimes as the Man of Sorrows alive but with the wounds of the crucifixion, sometimes in the so-called Ecce homo depiction scourged but still without the stigmata of the crucifixion. Taking up one's cross and following Jesus is a formulation that is encountered again and again beyond today's Gospel. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, for example, suggests to homosexual women and men: "to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition."

In the course of #OutInChurch we have heard stories of people who have had to hide for years, whose mental health has suffered from this game of hiding and the constant fear of consequences. In the course of #OutInChurch we have heard from the lesbian wife who lost her job, from the asexual person who desperately tried not to be asexual until she finally suffered panic attacks in those attempts. If we look into the universal Church, we can hear many stories of suffering from our queer brothers and sisters, of persecution or even imprisonment. Difficulties and suffering do not arise from homosexuality, bisexuality, asexuality or from being non-binary, trans or inter, do not arise from a queer so-called disposition. Difficulties and suffering arise where queer people are exposed to queer hostility in church and society. The Maneo contact point lists 731 cases of insults and violence against queer people in Berlin alone in 2021.

Where people are exposed to stereotyping and marginalisation through heterosexism, cissexism, general sexism, ableism, anti-Semitism, racism and all other forms of discrimination, these people, I suspect, do not first need the rhetoric of the sacrifice, but first the promise that Christ is with them precisely where they experience discrimination and violence. And they need this promise especially

where discrimination and violence take place in church contexts or even emanate from church officials.

This does not mean that Christ sacrificing himself on the cross cannot also become a source of empowerment.

I personally read the passage of the Catechism ("to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross ") in the meantime like this: Where I experience discrimination and violence because of my queerness, but also because of my disability or being read as female, I can share these experiences with Christ sacrificing himself on the cross. So it is not my queerness but the experiences of discrimination I have as a queer person in the Catholic Church that can be united with the sacrifice of the cross.

This is not to gloss over or make sense of the suffering that queer persons also experience in the Catholic Church. God does not need sacrifices, God does not need suffering. But where I experience discrimination and violence, I am also personally empowered by looking at the transfigured wounds of Christ. In other words, looking at the radiant wounds of the Risen Christ. For me, they are a sign that even from wounds, even from experiences of discrimination and violence, something new can be born. For me, they are a sign that experiences of discrimination and violence can be used to build a utopia, to build a church without fear. As queer Catholics, we suffer, but perhaps the visibility of our suffering will lead us to be the last generation of queer Catholics who have suffered in and of their church.

Building a Church without suffering and fear should be the task of all Catholics. So how do we persevere? How not to break with the status quo and instead build utopia?

I have already said that I will not attempt historical-critical exegesis today, that is, exegesis that asks how biblical texts came into being, how they are to be placed in their historical context. So when I as a queer person experience exegesis as empowering, it is mostly forms of contextual exegesis. Contextual exegesis or contextual biblical interpretation questions the texts from a certain point of view about what they can give us for our lives today. Queer exegesis asks from a queer point of view where the biblical texts can become a resource for queer people in their everyday lives. Queer biblical exegesis questions the biblical texts with regard to their queer potential. In a workshop at the Katholikentag in Stuttgart, two non-binary people told how important it is for them to search for traces of bodies and people in the biblical texts, but also in the Catholic tradition, in iconographic representations and stories of the saints, who resist binary gendering. One of the images they brought to the workshop showed something that I thought at first glance was clearly a vulva. Only in the explanation did I learn that it was not a vulva but a representation of Christ's side wound. Our history of piety knows the idea that the Church is born from the side wound of Christ. Christ's male body is thus

attributed the ability to give birth. Thus Christ's body becomes a queer body. Even if the term queer is a newer one, queer bodies and queer ways of loving and living are part of our tradition. For example, when a Bernard of Clairvaux, in his exegesis of the Song of Songs, transforms himself into the bride of Christ in his imagination and engages in cross-dressing and drag in the medieval monastic cell. Or when biblical love stories tell us about Naomi and Ruth or David and Jonathan.

I believe that we need queer theologies and queer biblical exegesis, the tracing of the queer potential of our tradition, to build as queer persons but also as allies in the face of discrimination and violence a utopia in which, as with Paul, categories of dominance and marginalisation lose their power in favour of a land of freedom. I believe that a church of diversity can grow out of the experiences of suffering of queer persons, if we realise that it is precisely our tradition and the biblical texts that empower us to this diversity.

Amen.