

Blessed Lord, you have caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn and take them to heart that, by the patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace and forever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life. Amen

Dear congregation

Three weeks ago, the evening of the elections in Germany: to those, all happy or disappointed commenting on the results and thinking about conceivable or impossible coalitions, Angela Merkel said: "There is strength in tranquillity - true this my motto, I'm going to think about the future". With that she withdrew from the heated discussion and made no un-considered statements.

"There is strength in the island of tranquillity", an ancient proverb, a timeless truth. Calmness, silence, meditation, prayer - moments of retreat. They help to centre, to ground ourselves. They help to look closely at our own wishes, to become clear in the tangle of the voices, wishes, demands of the world. They help us to be in conversation with God as the listener.

To talk and to act out of silence, that have many great women and men of history regarded as the right way. Already the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu or Laotse (604-531 BC.) Recognized the silence as the "greatest revelation," the source of all energies.

It is a commonality of all religions, taking the steps to live out of the silence and to engage with God. "Ora et Labora - Pray and work" was a motto of the ancient monasteries, a motto of Luther, the way of life for Jesus. Only few know that the saying goes on wonderfully: "Ora et labora Deus adest sine mora - Pray and work, God is helping without delay")

Let us listen to the sermon text for today's 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity (Mark 1:32-39):

*<sup>32</sup> That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. <sup>33</sup> And the whole city was gathered around the door.*

*<sup>34</sup> And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he*

*would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.*

*<sup>35</sup> In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. <sup>36</sup> And Simon and his companions hunted for him. <sup>37</sup> When they found him, they said to him, 'Everyone is searching for you.' <sup>38</sup> He answered, 'Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.' <sup>39</sup> And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.*

Lord, let your word be a blessing for us.

Dear congregation,

This section of the gospel according St. Mark could also be referred to as a report from a manager. Jesus of Nazareth: a coveted man who appears with a lot of self-confidence, talks and acts with authority. By some honoured and loved, hated by others. Even on a public holiday, the Sabbath, he works.

In the synagogue, he preaches and frees a man from an evil spirit. Then - in the house of Peter - he heals his mother-in-law of severe fever. In the evening, at sunset (the public holiday was now officially over), the whole city gathered in front of the door, the sick and possessed were brought to him. Jesus did not stop working, he healed until late into the night - the body and soul of humans. He healed the sick, freed the possessed and dispensed of guilt. "If you heal me, Lord, I will be healed; if you help me, it will help me" - that is how our week's watchword summarizes.

Jesus of Nazareth: A manager who has to deal with 80-hours work per week?

In fact, Jesus should be stressed that his work never ends. Because someone always wants something from him. However, this does not seem to be the case. And not as he is the Son of God, but because he keeps a good rhythm of praying and working for himself. He rises early in the morning, "even before sunrise," and prays.

And we? From me, I can only say that, when a lot of work has to be done, I shorten or leave out the time of deep prayer and the time of rest, in such moments I mean: I really cannot

afford it. I have to fill this time with work, that I manage somehow to get finished. And if I want to do something for myself, then perhaps a short swim before breakfast.

Jesus reacts completely different. He takes a retreat at some time to refuel himself in the stillness, to find himself again, to be guided by God. After that time, he will go on with vigour.

Another one who also had a lot of stress, was Martin Luther. During his times of immense workloads, the time of prayer was his source of power, his island of tranquillity, the reason for his serenity. He occasionally said, "Today I have a lot to do, so today I have to pray a lot." And the prayer made him free to leave some urgent work undone, when he realized that the work threatened to consume him. Once he wrote to his wife: "Dear Katharina, after a long day I sit by a measure of beer and think that God will make it already!" This healthy tranquillity is rooted in prayer.

Luther prays when he has stress. Because he knows, he even gains time! Whoever prays, gains perspective to things, looking at them with a different view, recognising how many of the daily problems are not so important.

Dear Congregation,  
we are living today in a "fast-paced accelerated society". Time, space and energy for regenerative rest, are scarcer than ever. Our age is becoming ever faster, more diffused and noisier than ever before. Constant beeping smartphones, always considered to be available. We are overrun by news from all over the world. Our to-do lists are getting longer. The possibilities are endless, and we do not want to miss anything, because we only have one life?

But all this burden our soul. Continual exhaustion is the result. The modern human despairs of his daily stress and restlessness, the pressure of constant accessibility. Especially in our time it is impossible to ignore: Whoever is driven only by activism and the work, who hunts the work and the stress, like being in the hamster wheel, and who does not

find any time to pause and to reflect - is broken.

Psychiatrists can tell us, looking at the long queues and waiting times in their offices. The poet Eugen Roth has summarized it wonderfully: "A man says - and is proud of it: I live for my work! But soon afterwards - not quite so cheerfully - he drowns in his work! "

"Prevention is better than curing," another German saying. How can I find peace to have "enough" time for prayer? Taking a shorter (or longer) break was always the best recipe for me. In the hustle and bustle of the working world, I went to the brothers of Taizé for a week to revitalize myself, for my family, church and my profession. Or this week I was three days in North Cape (Citrusdal, Clanwilliam).

But dear community, that Jesus is taking a break and praying is difficult enough for his disciples, especially when they turn to him as spokesmen of those who are not healed. After all, they could see that the relationship to the Father in Heaven is indispensable - for faith, for effect and acting. On behalf of the Father, Jesus was here for the humans. But that he left the words of his disciples completely unaddressed and asks them to go to another city - that must be thoughtful.

Who is this Jesus and why did he come? What is his mission and how does he fulfil it? It is a painful question because it is carried out on the back of the people who remain unhealed. Just as for all the sick the everlasting question "why".

Unanswered often enough. Of course, there are also answers, because there are assignments. People eat wrong, walk too little, smoke, drink too much alcohol, drive too fast with the car - consequences will appear.

Getting breathless by chasing success, by the greed for luxury and a career. Goals not achieved, or only with painful losses, destroy one's whole life plans. Make people depressed or burned out. Getting ill therefore, is no surprise and not a blind fate.

But even these people long for healing and freedom - and the others are also there. Where there is no logical explanation for illness or obsessed by evil forces.

The ruthless departure from Capernaum, so painful and seemingly incomprehensible for the victims, expands the field of Jesus's mission. Not only in one place can his mission heal the sick, but in many places and bring to as many people as possible the kingdom of God. Many people should hear what God has to say to mankind - his kingdom is there. Jesus lives the kingdom of God by turning himself to them; by forgiving sins; by showing that our measures for success or failure do not apply; and our health is not the most important thing.

Even sick, handicapped, suffering, possessed people have access to the main thing - that is a life in the kingdom of God. For this, God's message must be among the people - everywhere. In Capernaum, but not only there, in Galilee, but not only there - it must go further: in the beginning through Jesus; then through his disciples; and finally through all those who have discovered the path of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ.

Just as the people brought their sick relatives to Jesus, we, as messengers, with our faith and trust. Bring hope among the people, where there is a helper for their suffering.

We trust in his power to heal - against all human reason, experience, and trust that even those who are not healthy again are not cut off from life. We stand in love with such people, give them closeness and devotion, accompany them with deeds and good words.

The seemingly ignorant behaviour of Jesus, as well as all our unfulfilled expectations and disappointments of faith, do not prevent us from following Jesus's disciples. Much is incomprehensible in this way, many questions remain open, some are even annoying - and yet this Jesus is our way to the kingdom of God.

Dear congregation

From early childhood, we have been taught to work. "Resting", it seems to me, we must learn during life itself. But it is so essential and important.

I want to share a poem from Ursula Oben with you, some of you know German very well:

***Stille (2012):***

*In der Stille ruht die Kraft,  
welche du brauchst und dich erschafft.*

*Und willst du Klarheit, geh hinein,  
werde ganz still - tauch ein ins Sein.*

*Und sollten störende Gedanken  
in dein Bewusstsein hinein ranken,  
so stell die Frage, klein und fein:  
Was wird denn nun der nächste sein?*

*Darauf wird es ganz still in dir,  
du bist dann kurz im Jetzt und Hier.*

*Genieße diesen Augenblick  
und wend' ihn noch mal an den Trick.*

*Die Stille kann dir Heilung geben  
und dich in andre Sphären heben.*

*Drum nutze sie, gern Tag für Tag,  
auf dass sie dir Kraft geben mag.*

For the others, here is my try to translate it in English:

***Silence (2012)***

*Within the silence, there is the power station,  
Which you require for rejuvenation.*

*If you need clarity, go inside your presence,  
Become completely silent - dive into your  
existence.*

*And should there be thoughts disturbing  
Which with your consciousness ringing,*

*So ask the question, small and kind:  
What will be next in my mind?*

*Quiet then you will be getting,  
And now and here you will be resting.*

*Enjoy this moment, it's not in vain,  
And make it your habit, again and again.*

*Tranquillity can give you healing fast  
A new frame of mind will grow out of the past*

*Stay in the island, use this way,  
New energy empowers you every day.*

I wish you and me that we have the courage to relax and to give us quiet moments. That we cut frames into our fully planned agenda. Time frames which we open in full expectation, for ourselves, for breathing out and relief. For the encounter with God. To seek Jesus, to make our way to him, to direct our expectations and hope for him? I am sure that this search is going to guide us, leading to an extraordinary way. It will take us from the indifferent trot, from the omnipresent exhaustion.

This is what the event of the old time wants to tell us: when we look for Jesus, even follow Jesus - in the hustle and bustle, as well as in tribulation and loneliness – then He is the last one who hides himself, who could not be found or even stays concealed. But, every next step we must do ourselves, no one else other than us. Hopefully our lips will perhaps sing the old prayer (LH 341.1):

*"Jesus, still lead on till our rest be won.  
And, although the way be cheerless,  
we will follow, calm and fearless;  
guide us by Your hand to our Fatherland. "*  
Amen

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Saviour.  
Amen.