

Prayer:

Let us be still for a moment as we draw near to listen to your word God. Remind ourselves, why we are gathered together here. Pour into our hearts the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of guidance and strength, open our ears, our eyes and our hearts by your Holy Spirit, to see, hear and understand your vision for this place and our part within it. Grant, that we may ever seek Thy face with all our heart and soul and strength.

Amen

'I is another'

"Ich ist ein anderer"

"Je est un autre"

Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891)



This rather strange sentence comes from Arthur Rimbaud. The French poet wrote it when he was 16 years of age. In a letter to a friend. He didn't write: "I am another." Or: "I am actually something else." But: The 'I', the 'ego' ... whatever that is ... this mysterious 'something' ... the 'I', the 'ego' ... is something else.

What a strange sentence, dear congregation!

"I is something else." This sentence gets my imagination going. I, that is not really I / me, but something/somebody completely different. I am not simply the person you see. No, I am much more.

This is what, for example, a sports fan would say. I don't know so much about rugby or cricket, so I would rather refer to soccer. The fans who dress up for the World Championship or the European Championship in the colours of their country, in T-shirts or with colourful make-up. The fans who make a particular player their hero and copy his style. I am Lionel Messi. I am David Beckham. Or, if you want to suffer (!): I am Toni Kroos.

A true fan can say: My 'I' / 'ego' is someone else. My entire thinking, all my feelings are dominated by my idol. I put myself into his shoes and live like him. This soccer player or this musician or actor. Can you remember the film 'Being John Malkovich'? There we spectators could experience what it is like to

slip completely into the head and the body of the film star.

If you are not a fan yourself, you will find this rather weird. But doesn't a fan actually do / live in a way that is in fact familiar to us? This secret self-confidence, that in fact there's more to me than you actually believed! I might be a quiet, unassuming person. But 'Still waters run deep!' I may not be a real beauty, but anyone who kisses me will discover how I can shine! I may not be able to participate in your particular conversations, but I know much more on other topics.

"I am different. My ego is different". Of course, that could be an excuse: You all believe I am guilty, but it wasn't me. It was someone else.

- That becomes dangerous once I deny my own guilt.
- When I cannot face it that I have made a mistake.
- When I possibly even look for a scapegoat on whom to place my guilt.

I might place the blame on the Jews, or on strangers, or on the whites. Anyone except me. And this can escalate into a mental disorder. In fact, our strange sentence could be interpreted as being evidence of psychosis. The schizophrenic person also says: 'I is another.

It's a dazzling sentence. It indicates a certain longing, but is also problematic.

On the other hand, it could also be a sentence of love. Meaning: I do not live for myself, but am there for others. I am able to help. I can put my own ego behind me and can focus on the needs of others. Or I can even realise that: I love this person; my partner; my child. I am nothing without these other people.

As I mentioned earlier, this sentence is not my own. It comes from Arthur Rimbaud. In Rimbaud's case this sentence expresses a rapturous longing. You may, if you belong to the older, now mature and more settled generation, think: Yes, that's what sixteen-year-olds are like! But I find it amazing:

This young person wants something. He wants to write. And not only to describe in a naturalistic way what he sees. He does not want to concentrate on his own self and his own experiences. He wants to be open to other things. To something higher. He wants to give expression to something that is deeper and meaningful. To widen his outlook and his senses, to soar in his mind, to become

- a seer,
- a medium, like the ancient poets when they were inspired by the muses,
- a prophet.

Dear congregation, all this makes me experience very conflicting feelings. On the one hand, true sympathy. This great longing! This searching! This courage to make himself vulnerable!

On the other hand, this poet also alienates me. Is this sixteen-year-old not in fact altogether self-centred with his high-flying ideas? Making himself look important? Especially when one reads how he despises normal human beings? Perhaps this shows his love for an idea. But love for human beings surely looks different!

„It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.“ This is what Paul writes. And this is the biblical equivalent of the sentence: ‚I‘ is another.“ What does Paul mean with this? Is he a fan of Jesus? Does he want to imitate him like an Idol?

Does he suffer from a mental disorder? Does he divert attention from his own guilt by identifying himself with Christ? Is he driven by a yearning like the young Rimbaud? By the urge for higher significance and a deeper meaning? Or is Paul so filled with love for Jesus, that God's Son becomes alive in him? *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.“*

This sentence is at least as puzzling and dazzling as Rimbaud's words.

And it too comes from a letter. I read from the 2nd chapter of the letter to the Galatians, the verses 16-21:

*Yet we know that a person is made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law. And we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be made right with God because of our faith in Christ, not because we have obeyed the law. **For no one will ever be made right with God by obeying the law.**”* But suppose we seek to be made right with God through faith in Christ and then we are found guilty because we have abandoned the law. Would that mean Christ has led us into sin? Absolutely not! Rather, I am a sinner if I rebuild the old system of law I already tore down. For when I tried to keep the law, it condemned me. So I died to the law - I stopped trying to meet all its requirements - so that I might live for God. My old self has been crucified with Christ. **It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if keeping the law could make us right with God, then there was no need for Christ to die.”**

New Living Translation

Paul also has a guiding principle: change, a new beginning, breaking with the old, the familiar, the inadequate. Becoming open to something completely different, new, fulfilling. He writes: *“So I died to the law“* ... *“- so that I might live for God”*, The Law is the norm, the rules according to which our world works: criminal laws, SARS-regulations, morals and manners, the laws of nature of business. Our world is regulated down to the last detail. DIN-standards and traffic rules.

All this is meant to be of service to our lives, protecting us from lawlessness and chaos. I am grateful for our laws when I hear of the hell raging in war-torn parts of the world. And when I see how the Putins, Trumps and Erdogans of the world want to replace liberal law with their Wild-West or Wild-East methods, my gratitude for our liberal rule of law grows. Even though the laws sometimes restrict me and over-regulate my life.

Sometimes I experience my ego as being determined by others. Laws can regulate and protect. But they cannot free us. They still leave the longing for freedom, for real life, unfulfilled.

Therefore, my ego is always something else. It is alienated by the rules and laws under which I live. I cannot live otherwise. After all, I am not alone on a lonely island. And even there my ego would be alienated, by the lack of company and the loneliness. What a romantic illusion: I could easily be myself!

Yes, the laws can help me cope with the world. But I mustn't make the mistake of thinking that through them I will become a happy, free person, a great and good man.

And especially not in the eyes of God. For that I would not only have to comply with every single law, always and forever. But I would also have to live according to the highest, the most important commandment: to love and trust God and to love others like myself. Each one of us can test him-/herself and see how successful he/she is.

The Bible has a specific term that shows that we are not at peace with God: namely sin! Sin is the indicator of a life that is determined by external factors. I am a different person. Different from what God actually wanted me to be. The 'I' is a sinner.

That does not mean that I'm a traffic offender. A calorie dodger. A tax evader. Or a yellow-card getter (to come back to sport). But it means: I am different from what I should be according to God's will. I should live in loving harmony with God - and with my fellow human beings. But the reality of my life is different.

Is there any way out? Is there an alternative to this sobering reality? People with emotional upheavals like Arthur Rimbaud long for it. And so, do the fans. The unrecognised geniuses. Those who love. And probably also the psychotics. Is there a way out?

Salvation certainly does not mean that in the end I would really be able to be me. Rimbaud guessed that. Just like Martin Luther when he said: Man is an animal to be mounted. It just depends on who rides him. The devil or God. My ego is definitely not me. It is something else. The only question is whether it is a good or a bad 'something'.

It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. That is what Paul writes. He thus accepts that 'I' am a different being. Which does not mean that I am less than I am, that I am less worthy. On the contrary, it means that I become the real me through the relationships in which I live.

It all depends on God's Love for you and me in Christ Jesus - who made the 'I', the 'me', the person that I truly am in Christ. God brought this 'I' in relationship with God's 'I', the I am, in Baptism. This is the foundation of the 'I' that we can always and forever fall back on. It means that I become the real 'me' through this relationship. God has loved me and continues to love me still. This has made and will continue to work for my good to make me the 'I' that I am in Christ.

Forever loved and redeemed.

Amen.

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