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„Sharing the spirit of tomorrow“

Sermon for the service in the St. John's Church in Tallinn on May 29th, 2022

Scripture reading von Romans 8:12-17

<sup>12</sup> So then, brothers and sisters, we are obligated, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— <sup>13</sup> for if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” <sup>16</sup> it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if we in fact suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

This Sunday puts an important question to us: How are we spirited? What is driving us? Is it a spirit of depression or a spirit of empowerment?

The apostle Paul asks us this question using special images: Is it the spirit of the flesh or the spirit of God that is driving us?

These days, it seems easier to describe the spirit of the flesh. Its main characteristic is fear. There is a lot of fear around us. Fear to die in the war that started in Ukraine, fear of oppression, fear of losing freedom and a good living. It is a fear that people here in Estonia share with many people world wide. In our consultation we shared these fears that people in Kyrgystan, in Romania, in Namibia and India can relate to. Also in Germany, many people remember the second world war and its consequences: fear, hunger, loss. There is also still the covid 19 pandemic like a sleeping lion, threatening our lives, our health, our community. Beyond this global fears there is also a special fear in our churches. It is the fear of irrelevance. It includes the fear of becoming smaller, more invisible, less important.

What is it that Paul places against all these fears? It is the spirit of kinship, the spirit of being sons and daughters of God.

Well, images of family are not always easy. Some of us experience family as a place of bondage, bondage to traditions, to obedience to a father or a mother who are not loving, who treat their children unfair or even badly.

For some people it is lifelong stress to be someone's son or daughter. And no matter, whether we are mothers or fathers: We are all sons or daughters, that is how we enter life. And: We always stay being a son or a daughter. Whenever I come home to my parents, suddenly, I feel like a 12-year old daughter and sometimes, I am treated like a 12-year old daughter. Family dynamics are hard to change.

Now Paul tells us: We do not only belong to our biological family. Being a Christian puts us into a spiritual family. Maybe, you think: Well, one family is really enough for me, keeps me busy enough. Why should I need a second family?

Being a son or a daughter of God means no conflicts or bondage or stressful relationships but::

Being a son or a daughter of God grants us dignity, no matter what is done to us and what we have done to others.

Being a son or a daughter of God grants us hope that overcomes fear and enables us to search peace, to trust in God's future for this earth.

Being a son or a daughter of God grants us courage to overcome fear and oppression, to overcome hesitation and concerns to start new ways of being church, to work for peace, to struggle for integrity of creation and slowing down climate change.

We can do this because we are God's sons and daughters.

When I talk about children of God I think of a very impressive movie, called „dead man walking“. It is from 1995, based on a novel by Helen Prejean. Main characters are a nun, sister Helen, and a prisoner, Matthew who killed a young man and raped a young woman. Through discussions with Sister Helen, Matthew works through all his arrogance, hatred and chauvinism. At one point shortly before Matthew will die from a lethal injection Helen tells him: Matthew, you are a son of God, no matter what you have done. And it is this point that makes Matthew break down and confess. On the way to his death he asks the father of the boy for forgiveness. Being accepted and loved in the midst of hatred and violence, this experience opens a perspective to change – for him and also for us.

Being God's son or daughter indicates: we have a strong relationship with God. It means: we can trust God, and we need not be afraid of God. We can call God our father, our mother, source of life, our vis-a-vis, sustaining us, nurturing us, supporting us in our daily life through God's spirit that gives us power, strength, courage.

Kinship with God is one image for the spirit that is driving us. The other image that Paul uses is inheritance: We are all heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

Inheritance is also an image that is not easy in our world. I do not know about inheritance rules in Estonia, but in Germany sometimes families split up when it comes to inheritance. Brothers and sisters end up in feelings of jealousy towards each other, they feel neglected, overseen, cheated. Lots of emotions together with economic interests spoil family relationships.

With God's spirit, it is different: No need for conflicts about power and who is first. If we inherit God's spirit, we inherit something that will not become less when we share it. It is just the opposite: it will grow.

Sharing the spirit of Christ, for Paul this is not only sharing Christ's suffering, but overcoming suffering, sharing resurrection, new life. It is sharing a spirit that opens doors to tomorrow. That gives us new perspectives also for today

Sharing the spirit of tomorrow, in my church in Germany this became an important claim. It means: We do not cling to how church used to be, we try to be open up towards change and innovation. We try out new ways of being church, in the virtual world, in ecumenical ways with other Christians, with partners in civil society who also work against poverty and racism.

For example: We open our churches for neighbourhoods, for children who look for a good place to be and to play, for parents who seek a place to meet and talk, for refugees to learn our language and get legal advice. All this changes our church life, it enriches our communities and creates new partners and new „family members“.

So, once we become aware that we inherit the spirit of Christ we do not stick fearfully to the past, to the status of a powerful church that might be lost, but we turn our hearts towards the future.

Sharing the spirit of tomorrow means in my church: we ask God and we ask our brothers and sisters about their dreams and visions of church. We listen to many different people and ask them: what should our church do in the future? And we start following these ideas with open eyes and open hearts. Sometimes we do not know where the spirit will guide us, whether a new idea of being church will be a good idea.

But we trust that by trying new ways we learn about being church and living as children of God. Often, we do not know exactly how it will work out, but we trust, that it will work out somehow.

And we experience also in our consultation: there is not just one way of being church. Sharing the spirit of tomorrow means: we are diverse, colourful, church in multiple ways and forms. We are united by the gospel, by the spirit, by our kinship as children of God being one body of Christ. We share the mandate of communicating the gospel in words and deeds. How we do this will be different depending on the context, the challenges and the talents of the local church.

But we know and we accept: there are manifold ways of being church, of living our faith. We can live and enjoy this diversity because we share one spirit, the spirit of kinship, the spirit of Christ, the spirit of tomorrow.

Amen.