



Landesbischof Heinrich Bedford-Strohm

Predigt am 06.08.2017 in Edinburgh (englische Fassung)

Dear brothers and sisters,

It is a great honor and a great joy for me to be with you today in worship to celebrate 500 years of reformation together! We have already celebrated this century event in Germany in many ways. Everywhere I go as a bishop for invitations to local anniversary events I experience a lot of enthusiasm. Local school teachers write reformation plays around Martin Luther and his wife Katharina von Bora and children as well as adults perform the plays beautifully. 22 000 choir singers have participated in regional performances of the pop oratory on Martin Luther which one of the top German music producers has composed and over 100 000 have seen and heard. A film on Katharina von Bora prominently shown on TV had double as many viewers than expected. And I could go on.



But what moves me most and is a source of special hope for me, is the ecumenical character of the anniversary year. For the first time in history we as Protestants are celebrating a reformation anniversary not in highlighting our protestant profile by putting other denominations down but in pointing toward the one who was in the center for Martin Luther himself: Jesus Christ. We are celebrating the anniversary as one big Christ feast. And our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters just as those of other denominations are celebrating it with us in a truly ecumenical spirit.

And we celebrate it internationally. Yes, the reformation is a world citizen! Our common witness to Jesus Christ is stronger than any national border. We feel the community around Christ in our international ecumenical networks. And this witness is a blessing to a world which is shattered by new division, by new nationalism, by "my country first" ideologies which deny our common humanity and the equal dignity of each human being created in the image of God and not to the glory of a nation or religion.

That a German Lutheran bishop is now preaching in an Episcopal church in Scotland, is only one expression of the friendship around Christ which goes beyond the barriers which we as human beings are sometimes erecting so quickly.

Christ leads us together. So it really is worth looking closely at today's gospel story and the epistles reading. Because they tell us something important about Christ. It is a mysterious story which Luke tells us. Jesus goes up on a mountain with Peter and John and James to pray. And while he is praying, the appearance of his face changes, and his clothes become dazzling white. Suddenly two men appear who are identified as Moses and Elijah, and they talk to him. For me this is a clear reminder of the rootedness of Jesus - and with him of our Christian faith - in Hebrew scripture. Without Moses and Elijah we cannot understand Jesus.

Then, something strange happens: a cloud appears and overshadows Jesus and his three disciples; and they are terrified as they enter the cloud. Then from the cloud comes a voice that says, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

This story has only one central message. It wants to point to Jesus as the one through whom God speaks to us. It says: Look at Jesus, look at his life and listen to his words, let his love enter your soul and you will understand the way God has provided for you and your life.

In today's epistle reading we have heard the author of the 2nd Peter's letter - whether it is Peter himself or somebody who puts himself on his place - tell about his witness to the scene on the mountain with Jesus:

"For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain."

This report strikes me. Because it gives a slightly different wording of the voice from the cloud: "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." This wording is very important. Because we know it from another story about Jesus which has become of utmost importance to us as baptized Christians. It is the story of Jesus' baptism through John the Baptist. And here we are encountering the very same words as in Peter's account of the mountain experience.

Listen to what happens after John the Baptist had baptized Jesus and many others:

"Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Dear brothers and sisters, this is a powerful message! And it is so relevant for us!

The heaven was opened! What an amazing image! What a powerful sign! What a wonderful eye opener for you and me and for all of our future! God says: "Look at

this man, Jesus! Stay with him and listen to him, and you will have my presence with you now and forever." That is what this story tells us, and that is why heaven opens. Heaven opens for Jesus and heaven opens for all of us who go along with Jesus.

Yes, dear brothers and sisters, Jesus opens the experience of the Holy Spirit for all of us. And baptism is the visible door opener for it. As we are baptized, God's voice from heaven to Jesus becomes God's voice to us all.

"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." This sentence, spoken to Jesus, and, through Jesus, to all of us, makes the one big difference in our lives. It makes your and my life bright and gives it a solid basis that nothing and nobody can ever destroy anymore. "You are my Son, you are my daughter, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Yes, this sentence spoken by God carries a wonderful message to all of us: Jesus draws you into the community of this sentence. Jesus brings this eternal God who is so awesome that we would normally have to nothing but fear him, Jesus brings this God right close to you and makes you understand deep in your heart that you are God's beautiful child and God is with you and accompanies you and strengthens you today and every day of your life.

The voice from heaven says to all of us: You are God's beautiful children, and let never ever anymore put you or any other human being down. "You are my Son, you are my daughter, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Trust this sentence every time somebody tries to fool you with a different message. When you make a mistake at school or at work, and your teacher or your supervisor puts you down, then, you know it better, because God has said: "with you I am well pleased." And then you can do better next time.

When your children are not going the way you thought they should go and you think: I am a bad mother. I am a bad father, I have failed, you now know it better: because God has said: "with you I am well pleased." And then because you can love yourself again, you will love your child and be patient and keep caring for him or her also in the bad times.

And when you think that you cannot be a good Christian and that you keep neglecting what God wants from you and lose your trust in God's never ending love, then, listen to God saying: "with you I am well pleased."

It is a radical love which we experience when we really listen to this sentence, when we really let these words enter our soul. And it is a love which we do not only feel inside but which flows over from our heart to reach others. One of my favorite quotes from Martin Luther is an expression of this movement: "from faith thus flow forth love and joy in the Lord, and from love a joyful, willing and free mind that serves one's neighbor willingly..."

As a church we are called to be salt of the earth and light of the world by radiating this radical love of God which we proclaim with our very existence. We

are called to struggle for social justice nationally and globally, so that every human being on this earth can live in dignity. We are called to overcome violence so the cries of despair of those who have lost their loved ones by war and by terror finally come to an end. We are called to minimize violence against nonhuman nature, so that future generations can enjoy the beauty of God's creation just as we do today.

Baptism is the door opener to the freedom of the soul which we find when we open ourselves to God's radical love. Baptism is the visible sign for God's promise to never let us alone, to always accompany us in good times and in bad times. It is wonderful that today we will witness the baptism of a little baby who will, from today on, have this anchor in his life: Jesus is with me, every day.

Dear brothers and sisters,

This is what we can all take home today and let it be the spiritual food for this coming week: heaven is wide open for us. Jesus has opened it for us. We are God's beloved children. And our baptism is something like God's authentication for these words from heaven: "You are my Son, you are my daughter, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." This is why we can joyfully go into the world, serve each other and serve the world, struggle for justice and be witnesses of peace.

Heaven is wide open for us. What better basis can there be for a fulfilled and meaningful life here on earth!

AMEN