

⁷For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

2 Timothy 1, 7

Sermon for the International Methodist Service on 10.09.2017 in the Christuskirche

Dear brothers and sisters of the Methodist churches in Frankfurt

I. We are gifted by God

An acquaintance recently shared with me how his son was doing at his holiday job working for a big catering company. He had planned to work there for 6 weeks and was promised a reasonable salary. Not only did the caterer deliver food but also gave responsibility over running the complete management of a festivity – everything from aperitif to serve - proper attire for the workers was a must – and the caterer did provide it all.

When the first month was over the young man was looking forward to his great pay check. However, what did he find? The boss had taken off the rather significant amount of money for the work clothes. – Not much was left over of the salary. What a disappointment.

For us, however, counts the following: We are gifted by God and fully equipped and fully attired.

Yes, God searches for and wants our team work in his kingdom. This is what 2. Timothy is about: About cooperation and the engagement of Timothy and his congregation. For God binds himself with his work, his love and his blessing to our walking, carrying, and working with him for his kingdom. – He sends his friends, disciples, and us (!) into this world, out to the people.

However! He also equips us! – He gifts us with the necessary work clothing. – He gives us proper tools. – Not only are we the ones who carry the expenses and the whole load necessary for our service in God's kingdom, but God gifts us out of his richness with what Christians need in this world!

II. Gifted with God's spirit

In Ephesians Paul is talking about the armors of God, here: the full armor of an elite warrior.

Timothy also covers the aspect of the dangerous side in serving Jesus. Paul is at that stage in prison after all. At other times, he had collected experiences of violence, not to mention the experience of being stoned.

All these for sure can be scary. It may cause us to rather pass on a challenge and retreat cowardly – “to be ashamed” is how Luther translated it.

And to “be ashamed” indeed has something to do with anxiety, with a kind of anxiety the way we in Frankfurt may be more familiar with. An anxiety maybe of embarrassing oneself, an anxiety of being considered “stupid”, being ignored or ridiculed, of having to take personal disadvantages out of our behavior and or even of losing acquaintances or friends.

And this fear, this shyness, this shame I know very well from my own life. When I participated last summer in a guided tour at the museum for modern art, I went through a situation of shame. The guide was making jokes on the fact that some people may think worship is beautiful. She thought these folks were backwards... I already had an answer prepared in my head, but bit my tongue and not said anything for I did not wanted to embarrass myself in front of all the people.

However: God still has gifted us! Equipped! Attired! And all this with his spirit!

And God’s spirit is not a spirit of despair or cowardness, - not a spirit we need to be ashamed of. On the contrary: God’s spirit is a spirit that enables us to be his, Jesus’ witnesses! – Witnesses of his love! - Witnesses of his mercy – which we have **experienced in our own life!** – Which has turned our life upside down and at least changed.

When God’s grace touched my life, when his spirit filled me, something fundamental has indeed changed in my life: Suddenly I was filled with the certainty that God loves me! That I am important to him and that he values me! – And that he wants to use me, - use us-, in order to build his kingdom.

And that is exactly what Paul wants Timothy and his church in Ephesus - and us all – to recall:

You do not need to be ashamed, dear Methodists in Frankfurt, do not be shy of – before anyone! Because God loves you! Because you are important to him! Because he has gifted you **with his spirit**.

Remember his love! – unfolded by the fire of his mercy in your life. - Receive this spirit anew: The Spirit of power, love and tranquility, and order to pass on the gospel of his mercy to the people, the mercy that touched you also.

III. The spirit of power, love and self-control!

And indeed, when Gods mercy touched my life and changed it, a total new dynamic came over my life, a new interest, a new way of thinking.

I wanted to pass it on what I had experienced. I wanted to share it with other people, what has enriched my life. And so, I was searching for ways how to do it.

Through participation in JAT, then called JMM; in founding a Bible class for students at school, in getting a new kids group together at my church.

Yes, God gives us his spirit of power, - which is the spirit of dynamic! Of moving!

The experience of Gods mercy indeed opened my eyes for a total other world out there, for a total other life – in the love of God.

And this should put us on fire, dear Methodists. That's where we want to get to – to the kingdom of peace and love! – and with this a world should be moved and transformed, our fellow humans and the whole creation.

And we can help, cooperate, can chip in with our gifts, tons of them slumbering within us.

That should wake us up in our pews! When we see and recognize it.

And hence, God gives us also his spirit of love, of affection, of interest in other people, in our cocreation. The experience of God's love therefore does open our eyes for the bad stuff which we ourselves and so many around us live in.

Our world is going down! – Complete species are getting extinguished! – Humans are dying awful deaths. – And we are not indifferent! Gods will and *our will also* is that our children, grandchildren, acquaintances, - yes, all humans and the whole creation will be healed – will live in peace.

Therefore God gives us the spirit of love, of interest in each other, the spirit of affection, - that we get up and start walking towards each other – in order to share the witness of the mercy of God in all various ways and shapes with each other.

And therefore, God gives us the spirit of self-control, of reflection, thinking things through, and consideration.

The experience of God's Love in our own life hence does not make us euphoric or full of ecstasy, but foremost thinking and wise. – We suddenly notice clearly in so many paths, in how many situations, through how many people Gods prevenient grace has met us.

I am thinking of the project how Höchst is supporting Northern Ghana- and where some of us – maybe it should have been more of us- went to visit this January.

I am thinking of the project of the Vietnamese congregation which they will present to us today, - and where we can build bridges to our Vietnamese brothers and sisters – and at the same time experience encouragement and inspiration for ourselves.

I am thinking of the possibilities in supporting each other and cooperating among our congregations in the region of Frankfurt, - for instance in the area of youth.

I believe that our church offers great possibilities to experience Gods mercy close by and far away and to pass this on.

For God has given us his spirit, the spirit of power, of love and of self-control,

So that all people, the whole creation shall gain the knowledge of truth, the knowledge of the love of God in Jesus Christ, who heals us.

Amen

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