

**Sermon on 1. Timothy 6, 2-8, 22.01.2006**

*The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.*

Dear Congregation,

today we continue with the topic of what I, as an individual, can contribute to the life of the congregation. I had pointed out to you last Sunday, that a Church congregation does not have consumers or on-lookers, and that we are all urged to contribute to the every-day life of the congregation.

We have clarified that this is not the wish of the Church council or of the Pastor, but that this has something to do with a mission, which God has given to every one of us. All of us are called to work together like the limbs of a body, to help the kingdom of God to a breakthrough, just where we are.

I have said that this has something to do with the spiritual concept of solidarity. To explain this once again briefly: God declares himself to be in solidarity with us, sends his Son into this world, takes all our guilt upon himself, thereby giving us a part of all the gracious gifts, which he has generously distributed among us:

We can know that eternal life is awaiting us,

God gives us abilities

He gathers a congregation for himself, which he protects and preserves,

and I ought to make it clear to myself that God is not doing all this so that things will end when these good things come to me. It is not about God's gifts landing in a dead end street at last, but that we turn them into something. And if you had a bad feeling during the last two sermons, because you thought that I, as Pastor, want to push you into some form of active work, then I want to say very clearly once again, that all we do should be an expression of our gratitude towards GOD. To contribute something to a Christian congregation, therefore, is not a duty, not a business, not an organizational must, but an expression of faith.

I remembered the poem again, which describes our role as Christians so aptly:

*Christ has no hands, only our hands  
to do his work today.*

*He has no feet, only our feet  
to lead people unto his way.*

*Christ has no lips, only our lips  
to tell people about him.*

*We are the sole Bible which the public still reads.*

*We are God's last message,  
written in words and deeds. (Author unknown)*

Something else should be added: A congregation is like a symphony orchestra. All are responsible for producing a full sound. Every voice, every instrument is important. There are none that are more important than others. There are just a few, which, perhaps, as speakers for the orchestra or as "first violin" attempt to mediate between what the orchestra wants and what the conductor wants. Whereas, in a congregation, the conductor is not the Pastor, but Jesus Christ, however, it is, indeed, not possible for some to remain silent, not play their part, and others toot constantly on their instruments so one cannot fail but hear them. It is really not possible that out of 50 musicians only two play. How would that sound?

Recently, I heard about the Mbuti-men, a tribe in Central Africa, whom some people know as Pygmies. These people carve recorders, which produce only one note. Each recorder has a different note. In order to make music, therefore, the entire group must be well organized to create a piece of music out of the many single notes.

At the moment, we work on this in our congregation, too,. We would like everyone to play with us, our orchestra to grow and that all, if that is possible, play the same piece, I know this is very idealistic.

What, then, do we contribute? What can one do?

I have given a very general answer to this in the Seniors' Circle:

Contribute that, of which you have most. Besides the question, what do I have, what am I able to do, which the congregation needs, one should rehearse the situation once with this consideration.

Let us assume, you have much time. Use the time you have to read the Bible – this strengthens your faith – and use the time to pray for the congregational work. A congregation who does not pray for its work, is not a congregation but a business, or as we hear later on in the sermon text, a “means of gain”. It is always about what God wants to achieve with us. Therefore we must pray, first, to find out what he wants from us, and second, we must pray for the things which we do. I always urge you, for instance, to pray for our summer camp, that everybody can return home unharmed and healthy. We have always been protected; we feel that we are supported and are reassured, because we do know that many pray for us.

There are always tasks which are not difficult, but simply take time. Telephone calls. I am glad that so many talk on the telephone with each other quite regularly. It would be nice if we could ever achieve that people allow the distribution of information, like names and telephone numbers, so that those, who have a lot of time, could call others, who are also bored, to deepen the contact.

Do you have money? Do you give money? A touchy subject. To dispel the suspicion beforehand, that this is by far my wish or my idea only, I would like to quote a Bible text from the next Biblical book, at which we want to take a closer look, from the First Letter to Timothy:

*7)We brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; 8)but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content. 9)But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10)For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs.*

Not everyone has money. Sometimes there are people who think that just because they cannot donate much, they are not allowed to come here. That is nonsense. Everyone is welcome. And the worth of a person is not determined, at least not in a Christian congregation, by the extent of his assets. The matter is simple: The last shirt has no pockets, according to the text. We come into this world without anything and cannot take anything away from here. This should be mentioned beforehand and should actually be enough to think about.

Viewed in a practical manner, there is a good reason why we treat the amount of the donations extraordinarily confidential. We do not want to give rise to the impression, that the amount of the donation allows any form of influence regarding rank or expectation. It is confidential and this is good. Nor are there fixed clauses, which makes sense, but not everything is said hereby yet.

It is a fact that the regular donations have not substantially changed during the last five years. People, as a rule, give a certain amount, which has not changed, even though all costs have risen during the last years. I know that many become nervous now, when I say that in the Old Testament the “tenth” rule is to be

taken seriously. In Evangelical circles, too, the “tithing”, the giving of the tenth, is the very clearly expected norm. I have problems when someone says: Give ten percent, otherwise you are not a good Christian. However, I also have a problem, when someone has a lot and gives little, even though he could help the congregation to fulfill many important missions. I think, that is not Christian-like.

When we read here in the First Letter to Timothy, that people shall first adhere to the teaching and not deviate from it, then this is once again an indication that giving, which in the Biblical view should happen joyously, rests on this foundation. It is not about a Church, a preacher, an organization, which only want something – your money. An indication can be found here which is important, namely that money can turn into something which is in competition with faith. *10)For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs.*

Where the love of money begins and generosity ends, I am unable to judge; this you must ask yourself. I just think that it is important to know, that there lies a danger here, when one is too busy with increasing one’s money, and on the other side will deprive other people of it who are in great need of it. “Solidarity” is here the cue again.

I do not know whether you know this, but the Synod has employed someone who counsels people in this matter. He does not receive anything for this, nor has he a personal advantage. He is independent and neutral, which I, personally, find very important. And he knows models, which can also offer advantages in leaving a bequest, and at the same time, help the congregation.

We could not have achieved many things, if people had not supported this congregation through bequests, even beyond their lifetime. Perhaps you, too, would like to think about this. I shall give information about it in the next congregational bulletin.

Next point: Take part in our work, in a committee, in preparing for special events, continuously or whenever you have time, every bit helps. And here, the text, too, helps us once again:

*3)If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching which accords with godliness, 4)he is puffed up with conceit, he knows nothing; he has a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions, 5)and wrangling among men who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.*

It is not about pure business matters, neither in the Church Council. It is, without question, important, but we are not a firm. For us, it must be about the building up of the congregation. About the question how we are founding a community, win people for faith and strengthen their faith.

The consequence that follows is, that we ourselves also must really live accordingly as much as possible. It is about our own example, about understanding one another, about listening and tolerance. Whoever always thinks that only he is right, the people in the congregation of Timothy had to find this out unfortunately, will produce dissension through questions and disputes about words. Unfortunately, also in Church congregations, there is a great deal of human nature at work, which can make work enormously difficult. What the text says is, that it is not about personal vanities, but about the well-being of all. One shall be pious but not puffed up.

If you would read the entire letter, you would also read two sentences, which actually capture quite well, against what we ourselves – not the others, but we ourselves – must submit to be measured:

1.Timothy 1, 5: *Whereas the aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith.*

1.Timothy 6, 11: *Aim at righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness!*

Love remains the supreme commandment, also in everything that I have presented to you here in the last three weeks and beaten about your ears. I do it out of love for people and the work of God in this congregation. I am not so conceited as to preach only to get you moving or to cause you a bad conscience. My goal is to further your spiritual growth and urge you to also act in this congregation. according to your faith

As God's possibilities are limitless, it is our fault if we do not make enough use of the many resources which we have, without question, – we have time, we have money, we have abilities which we can contribute!

As I want to be fair, I shall put myself under the magnifying glass for once next Sunday. We shall hear what the tasks of a Pastor are.

In the meantime, I hope that you will take these words about congregation and engagement to heart and do what you can. I rely on you to examine yourself and contribute out of gratitude towards God. Amen.

***And the Peace of God, which passes all understanding, may keep our hearts and our minds in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.***