

## Sermon on 2. Timothy 2+4, 29.01.2006

*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,

in the last three weeks I have been preaching about the congregation. I have based on the First and Second letter to the Thessalonians and the First letter to Timothy tried to point out, that we all have a call, that God can all of us use us to build his kingdom. There are no customers, or onlooker in the church, there is participation according to the gifts and the resources God has given to all of us.

Some said, you are preaching to the wrong crowd, you are trying to convert the converted and in parts that is true, because most of you are the people who hold this church together, who have been involved ever since or to a high degree. But after I have thought about it and agree that all of the 480 to 500 members and affiliates of Martin Luther Church should read the last three Sermons, I nevertheless think that even those who do their best here, need to know why they do it and for whom they do it.

And that is already part of the Sermon today, because I have promised all of you listening to what I have beaten you around the ears that today you can sit back and relax. It is my turn now. What about the Pastor of the church, what about the work I do, what about my contribution, my expectations, my leadership?

The first thought I would like to share with you, might sound to you as if I am trying to make my way around this topic, but it isn't. In fact, it is at the very heart of the matter. The church should never be about the Pastor. The worst reason for either staying away from the Services and the events of a congregation or attending them is the Pastor. A congregation should never totally depend on one person. A congregation should never so much identify itself with a person that this person becomes the back, front a center of the congregational life. Don't get me wrong we will clearly see what the role of the Pastor is and what rules and expectations of the biblical sense he needs to follow. But the first thing you need to understand – and without it you won't understand what my work and position is all about, that what we are dealing with and what we are asked to accomplish is far bigger than just how the Pastor does or doesn't do.

There is no different between you and me that we are all mandated to follow Christ, that God should be in the centre of what we do and how we do it all the time. It is a joint venture not between me and the congregation but always keep that in mind, always, between God and us. I say this because I have seen many churches who were all they were because of the Pastor they had. I have seen churches which were bound and in most of the cases limited to what the Pastor was all about. If the Pastor did a lousy job, the congregation was lousy, too. If the congregation was known, they were known because of this one person, and not because of the many good things they also did. And that is a pity. We should be acknowledged and recognized by how much we trust in God and do his will, rather than by being the church of Pastor so and so.

Alright, after that is clear we can move on to the next item: What are the duties of a Pastor? What regulates of what he is supposed to do?

In all of the job descriptions of Pastor you find three things in particular: A Pastor should preach, teach and do counseling. Unfortunately, the word counseling does not reflect the notion that this is more about the caring of the soul, than it is about mediation.

These three duties are strictly biblical and involve all sorts of different concrete actions. But basically that is all there is. Is this sufficient? Is this enough? I say no. Because that does not tell us a word on how someone

is supposed to do his preaching, teaching and counseling as a Pastor. How the attitude of this person should towards the people and towards God.

Let's dig a little deeper. The next stop on our journey through the bible contains a lot of good advice to someone in ministry and you as parishioners should circle this in your bible and the next time you employ a Pastor, check if the candidate lives up to the expectations formulated in two passages of the letter which I am going to read to you now. It is 2. Timothy 2, Verses 22 to 26, and Chapter 4, verses 2 to 5:

That's how it reads:

**Text:**

*<sup>22</sup>Shun youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. <sup>23</sup>Have nothing to do with stupid and senseless controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. <sup>24</sup>And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, patient, <sup>25</sup>correcting opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth, <sup>26</sup>and that they may escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.*

*<sup>2</sup>Proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. <sup>3</sup>For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, <sup>4</sup>and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. <sup>5</sup>As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.*

Sounds like a checklist, doesn't it. Now go home and check whether I fall into the named categories. – Okay, maybe later, after the lunch and the movie, of course. And allow me to give you a few explanations of what I read to you.

First and mostly important: In chapter 2, verse 24 appears the word "servant". The one who preaches, teaches and counsels is supposed to be the Lord's servant. Sometimes you here the phrase 'church leader'; and as much as I understand, why people use this phrase to express the responsibility of the minister, I think this is the right term, if we want to define the attitude of the person in this position.

See, you and I, we have both met many Pastors already. And if I would do the test with you I often do with the parents of confirmands, namely ask them what they remember of their confirmation class, I bet, although I shouldn't that you could not tell me exactly what you have learned, but for sure can tell me, how the Pastor was and how he treated you. This is engraved in your brain and tells you two things: There are many things which we as people can do wrong. But it is especially bad if a Pastor has done any wrong of any kind to you, because your expectation is, that he knows what to do and how to behave and you somehow know that he is in a position which actually does not allow him to make mistakes because he is dealing with people and any wrongs scar the mind and the souls of people. I have heard many times, 'I never come back to the church, because Pastor so and so had said this and this' or 'I do not bother to come to church, because Pastor so and so does not bother to come to my house'.

In many cases this on the part of the pastor deals with the circumstance that he or she does not want to serve, but to rule, sometimes with an iron fist. I was surprised to see many pastors in this country, in country where it is not your fate, but your choice in what kind of church you go, who have ruled their congregations. In my language there is a term for this kind of Pastor. They are called "Pfarrherr"; a very bad translation would be "parish-master". – Now you tell me, whether it is coincidence or not that the term leader is only used 3 times in the New Testament, also in one case in a negative sense that the blind is leading the blind, but the word servant is used 72 times. If you recall, Jesus himself said about himself in the gospel reading: "...the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'

Not to be served, but to serve... Who am I as a Pastor that I demand to be served if the Lord of Lords came here to serve? That would be my first thing to do, when I were to shop around and pick a church to find out whether there is a master or a servant standing in the pulpit.

In the movie we are going to show you later on, there is Father Tredone, a very strict catholic priest. He comes into a conflict with a stranger, by the name of Joshua, who one day shows up in the small U.S. American town and who performs acts of random kindness. He is such a good person. Shortly after he had arrived people begin to like him and help him to rebuild a storm-damaged, small Baptist church. Father Tredone sees that under his eyes people get together, become a community and work on building g this church. One day he confronts Joshua and the people who help him by saying that he would expect people to follow him. And that no one does things just out of the goodness of their hearts in expects nothing in return.

If you see the way this priest reacts and how he talks you can see an oversize example of how many Pastors feel: Follow me! I have my church full one day. I will become someone people talk about because I am so good and I am always right, and God is always on my side. – That is so scary, but unfortunately so common. Pastors easily get jealous and have mostly a problem working together, because the thought is not, how is God's work accomplished and how nice, that God is doing great things in that congregation, but the thoughts are, why does this not happen in our church, why do they have more people than we do...and things of that nature.

Last thought about this: Who's servant is the Pastor? What does it say here in the text: the Lord's servant? I think this is important and sheds some light on all those hostile situations I have seen in parishes, where the Pastor was treated like the servant, the slave of the congregation. This always ends in a disaster. This is not about the criticism the Pastor receives, or the pressure sometimes is put on him, but this goes right to the core of what the Pastor is all about: If it is expected that he is the servant of the Lord, than there also should only be one master above him and not the many you sometimes make out in one congregation. If you hear people saying things like "I have told the Pastor what to do..." than there is either the problem that the pastor does not serve or the problem those others than Jesus Christ wanted to be the masters of the congregation.

Enough said about that. Let's take a look at the other things been said in here:

What is the point of reference for a Pastor? His opinion, his will, his plans? No, clearly the bible. And I am sure you will hear about the bible if someone is truly a servant of Jesus Christ. This Pastor can not do other than telling people what the bible has to say *whether the time is favourable or unfavourable*. I do not want to make your ars itch, but ring.

You have often hear me say two things, when I was preaching at an unfavourable time or saying things very openly which I knew people would not like or would not want to hear very much, that this is part of what I am supposed to do. I am not paid to sugarcoat the realities we deal with in our lives or in our congregation. Secondly: What I preach to you on Sunday morning is preached already to one other person before: Me! I not just hear myself what I tell you, but I have to hear it and try my best to live accordingly, as much as I hope you take things to heart, God lets us know about through the bible.

I hope that you always know: I am not above you, I am among you. And that is the only time I can be at two places at the same time: Preaching to you and sitting with you in the pew and listening to what God wants from me.

- *Shun youthful passions*
- *pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.*
- *Have nothing to do with stupid and senseless controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome*
- *but kindly to everyone,*
- *an apt teacher,*

- *patient,*
- *correcting opponents with gentleness.*

Okay, I try my best. I know, that I get sometimes carried away. I guess the youthful passions I have left behind, pursuing righteousness, faith, love and peace among us. I wished that I could have nothing to do with stupid and senseless controversies, which you can not always flee, but, that is how I understand it, avoid by not contributing to it. The basic rule here is, to think things through, to find arguments, never to engage in a conversation, when I am angry, and to go and try to clear the problems in a very early stage, where it is often possible to talk factual and not emotional about problems. I always tried to attempt situations, but was not always successful. But it only happened very rarely that people avoided me and did not want to talk to me again.

I try to be kind, sometimes firm, and stubborn, but kind, be a teacher, there you go, with – now there I get failing marks – patience. God give me patience, but now! See, I probably will never learn why it needs to take a long time to discuss things, when it only would take a short time to do things.

Correcting opponents with gentleness. I think I can do better, I try to be diplomatic, but it also drives me nuts, when someone wants to find the hair in the soup and even if there is none, keeps searching and brings up the same old, same old for years and years.

Now, let me warp things up with a few remarks about my actual work and how I try to do it:

My basic concern is that we altogether grow in faith. I get more and more restless and at times impatient when people take so much time to focus on the bad and do not see the many good God offers to him. I have a problem with Father Tredone kind of clergy and congregational members, who are so good with finding reasons why this is not for them and why they think they can not do anything in return for God, and shut themselves off from the most powerful source, God himself, to overcome all hardships, all quarrels, all burdens life has certainly, I do not doubt this, presented to them.

I personally always liked to talk, that is the reason why my former girlfriend, my wife for 19 years, asked me one day if I do not want to consider becoming a pastor. This was one of the most crazy things I have had ever heard to that point. I could not believe that I am capable of this huge responsibility this position as Pastor offers; sometimes I am still wondering that God has lead me this way and that people take the risk to have me as their Pastor.

I strongly believe that theology helps us to understand the bible, but that there are also biblical statements which are non-negotiable. I can not stress this, but in my estimate, every Pastor should strongly believe in the Resurrection of Christ, Eternal Life, that Jesus lived and that he will come back one day. I do this after I have studied the bible and philosophy as a critic of faith and someone who had his doubts. I have come to believe, because I found out for myself, that it is important to trust God more than my small stupid little brain.

I believe also that God wants to be experienced in a relationship with him. Christianity is the only religion which claims a personal relationship with God. I believe that a Pastor does not bring himself, but the message of his Gospel to people. That is why I have preached today about the Pastor, but that is it for a long time.

I believe in the good of people. I did not meet anyone in all this years who was only bad. Everyone has a good core. I believe it is important to be close with people and give as much as I can of my time and my dedication to built community. Also because I think, Jesus would do the same thing. Amen.

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