

## Sermon on 2. Peter 3, 13, 05.03.2006

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

**Text:**

<sup>13</sup>*But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.*

### 1. Talking about time

Dear congregation,

People generally think that time is consistent so that every single second has exactly the same length. But we all know that this is not true, at least not in our personal experience, because there are times in our life which go by way to quickly. Those are moments of happiness and joy; the times, when we are on vacation or enjoy being together with our wife or our husband. The youth is also a strange chapter of our life: When we are young we can not wait until we have grown up, and when we are grown up, we usually want to be young again.

There is also the opposite, when time which goes by too slowly, the time, for instance, when we wait for a result from the doctor, the time, when we have to wait until someone finally comes home. The time of despair or of grief, which seems to be going on forever. There are these moments, and I assume you all have been there, when time is slowly dragging along and the only question is: When will it be over? - I hope that is not what you are thinking right now and if so, be so kind and don't let it show.

I give you these examples because I want you to realize that our perception of time is determined by our experiences. Time is not only a technical category which allows us to measure moments and counting intervals of time. Time is something which varies depending on what is going on. Wouldn't you agree?

Today's bible text is talking about time, although this word is not even mentioned in the text:

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### 2. Waiting for a change

This text talks about a time of waiting. Those people way back when, when this letter was written to them actually expected that every minute Christ could come back and erect his kingdom. They were desperately awaiting a change because they suffered a great deal under the circumstances of their time and on top of it the mess which false prophets created in their congregation. At the same time, they had no idea how these expected events of a new heaven and a new earth really would unfold. They were hoping for something to happen, and were waiting for it, but they did not know exactly when and how and even if in their lifetime God would bring an end to all suffering.

In a few weeks I will come back to the question if there is any possibility to predict the time of these events, when we will be talking about the Book of Revelation. For today I do want to get into the detail of the actual event and how and when this may happen. I am more interested in the human perspective of awaiting something new from God.

Wouldn't it be strange if someone would just sit somewhere on a chair and another person walks up to this person and asks: "What are you doing?" and the person replies: "I am waiting for a new heaven and a new earth"? – This probably is the moment when person No. 1 is calling the doctor to have the mind of this other person checked out.

This leads directly to my question I want to ask you and me this morning:

### 3. Are we still waiting for a new earth and a new heaven?

And I need to explain that, I think. First I explain what I do not mean by this. I have shown a cartoon to my confirmands in which you see a mess of broken things, a wrecked apple tree and a dead snake dangling from

a branch. Adam and Eve they themselves look terrible and Adam asks God: “We are done with subduing. When do we get a new one?”

Waiting for a new heaven and a new earth is not about getting a new one after we finally have succeeded to destroy old one. This earth is not a toy or an experimental kit where we can mix our chemicals and do our experiments and if everything goes up in flames we get a new one. We are very good wrecking this world I must say. No animal would be as stupid as we are and would cut the branch on which we sit. We do not respect nature, animals and people; otherwise we would not pollute, not recklessly exploit nature, kill people, wreck the environment and change the climate. All of this happens as we speak. We may be finally able to destroy this planet if we do not stop. But does that mean that we automatically receive a new one?

I strongly oppose notions – and right now you can hear quite a few preachers talking about this – that we have to push for certain events to happen with the goal in mind to help this world go under so that God can provide us with a new one. That is the idea of: God has predicted certain events to happen in the last days, so let us make them happen and then the last day go by quicker or finally unfold. And this is not something we can only laugh about. If you are able to read between the lines foreign politics you will find out that some of the things which concern us so greatly right now are the product of a misunderstood and misleading interpretation of the bible. How sick is that?

In order to do everything to destroy this world we are on the contrary called to do everything possible to protect our planet. I can show you according to the Hebrew text of the first chapter of the bible what is meant by ‘subduing’, ‘taking dominion over’ or ‘ruling over’ the creation. There is a huge responsibility included in the notion of mankind being the “crown of creation”. Being made in the likeness of God means putting on the mind of Christ. Do you think Christ would have invented the atomic bomb? Do you think Christ would be interested in making war? Do you think Christ would blow himself up or invade a country for oil, or would neglect the poor, or take a car to Tim Horton’s although you could walk there in two minutes? – I don’t think so.

Having clarified this, the question remains: Are we waiting for something? Are we waiting for a new heaven and a new earth?

As far as I know, most of the people would phrase this differently and say: “It’s not me waiting for a new heaven; I think: Heaven can wait!” - There was this old couple who died on the same day and go to heaven. And they walk around and everything is just so nice and beautiful; wherever they look, wherever they go it is just so totally awesome up there. And after a while the husband turns to his wife and says: “If you would not have forbidden me to smoke my cigars and drink my Brandy I could have been here ten years ago!”

Okay, there are better jokes but the truth is that heaven is in the end something we can look forward to. But since we do not know, when we get there and I strongly recommend to stop smoking cigars and having too much Brandy.

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The idea of this text is certainly a little different from our first perception. It is not about the then, some time, who knows when. It is not only about the heaven to come it is also about the world which is.

Right now this text wants to give comfort to those who are awaiting the arrival of righteousness, of justice. This congregation Peter writes to was under pressure from within and from outside. They are victims of injustice and false teaching. And all they are longing for is righteousness. And Peter writes to them saying: “Look, do not worry. What is God’s promise? He has promised to set things right. One day sooner or later he will bring all this to an end which affects you negatively in so many ways. On top of that: People will have to give account of the evil deeds one day.”

Do you understand? This is more than just the prospect of the end of time. This already gives hope and comfort to all who endure injustice and oppression. They can know that God is on their side. God declared his solidarity with the disadvantaged and the poor. I guess we have to understand this. And if we understand the theology behind it, it will automatically lead us to the question:

#### **4. What do we do in the meantime? Do we simply wait for this to happen? Isn't it finally God's job to clean up the mess we have produced?**

Christianity has never been a fatalistic religion, like Hinduism, where you just can wait until it gets better the next time around. Christianity is based on action and perfection. If you read any of the Gospels you will find out that Jesus and his friends are always doing something. It is not that they just hangout and wait. Even when Jesus retrieves from the crowds to be alone, he is praying and gathering strength to continue his mission. Jesus is urging his friends to strive on and preach and teach and baptize and check whether people obey the teachings, a never-ending job, by the way. – Why would he say something like that, when there is nothing which could be done or changed? Why is he urging the disciples to roll up their sleeves and tour the country when there is nothing except waiting to do? He never said: Let's be lazy, because my Father in heaven is changing things around anyway – why bother? When I would have to think of a sentence that Satan could say it certainly would be: 'Why bother?'

Isn't it great that although we know that God is bringing justice and peace to us one day that we can work as his co-workers for good causes and help him that he does not need to fix all of it? I get my rewards in my profession through the small things I see growing. The mustard seeds which sooner or later develop roots and start to grow. We can very likely not change the course of the world, but we can change the direction in which our life is heading, sometimes we can influence our neighbour's life and sometimes if more people show up at an Annual meeting and all generations get involved we can even influence the direction our congregation is going.

In his book "The Alchemist" Paulo Coelho is talking about the shepherd who is looking for a treasure and along his way he meets all kinds of people. Among others King Melchisedek, the wisest of all man, who hands him a teaspoon with two drops of oil on it who gives him the following task: "As you wander around in my palace carry the spoon without allowing the oil to spill." – The shepherd is climbing and descending the many stairways of the palace, keeping his eyes fixed on the spoon. After two hours he returns to the room where the King was. "Well", the king asked, "did you see the Persian tapestries that are hanging in my dining hall? Did you see the garden that my gardener took ten years to create? Did you notice the beautiful parchments in my library?"

The boy was embarrassed and confessed that he had basically observed nothing. His only concern was to spill the oil; the king had given to him. – "Then go back and observe the marvels of my world", the King said and sent the shepherd on his way again. So the shepherd took his tour through the palace again and saw all the beauty and was stunned. Upon returning to the King he related in great detail everything he had seen. "But where are the drops of oil, I have entrusted you" the King asked looking at the empty spoon in the hand of the shepherd. "Well", the King continued, "there is only one piece of advice I can give you. The secret of happiness is to see all the marvels of the world, and never forget the drops of oil on the spoon."

Dear Congregation,

Do not be concerned about the oil only. Be concerned to see the beauty which still exists in this world. The beauty which is created by the kindness and the smiles of people around you. The beauty which lives within you. Let your light shine, your thoughts and prayers be heard. Do not forget that there is a world above us, waiting for us where in comparison the Persian Tapestry in the palace of Melchisedek looks like dirt on the wall. Let us live a live of anticipation that the righteousness of God will prevail. Let us be active and help God to spread the seed of love. It is not about succeeding; this we probably have to leave to God, but it is about trying. And in all we have to do the hope of what is to come can quicken us.

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