

## Sermon on 2. and 3. Letter of John, 19.03.2006

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

Dear Congregation,

today we look at two brief scriptures of the New Testament, the 2. and 3. Letter of John. The content of these letters is quickly told:

An Elder writes to the congregations. However, he does not want to deal with everything in writing, but he announces his imminent arrival.

In the 2. Letter of John he writes to the “Elder of the elect lady and her children”. Meant here is not, as one might think, a woman, but the congregation and its individual members. This congregation is in very close contact with the writer of the letter. And what he writes is actually not only for them, but for others, too, who are connected through faith. It is a letter to a congregation that is also meant for other congregations. First, it is about love, as it was last week already, and it is about false teachings and heretics, who cause a lot of disturbances in these congregations.

The false teachers deny that Jesus was indeed a human being. Perhaps I must briefly explain here that Jesus was believed to be a “true human being and true God”. Jesus is God’s Son, but here he was in flesh and blood. Jesus has been able to express a truth, which is not a human truth, but because he was sent by God, he is God’s word. But in spite of this, he died on the cross as a human being, like the two who died to his right and left on Golgatha. One shall avoid these false teachers who dispute this, nor should one, contrary to the oriental right to hospitality, take them in.

In the 3. Letter of John, the elder does not write to the congregation, but to a man named Gajus, with whom he apparently enjoys a very trusting and close contact. There are mutual friends in the village. Gajus is asked to take Christian missionary into his house, apparently he has done this earlier, too, and has given them the necessary support for their mission work. But in this congregation there is also a problem, for a man by the name of Diotrephus is against taking in these missionaries, and he expels those from the congregation, who do it anyway. He seems to be something like the congregational leader. This, then, shall be cleared up during the prospective visit.

What has one to do with the other? It is about two different congregations with two different matters in case. Why does it make sense to deal with these two letters at the same time? It is more or less about the question, how the congregations prove themselves in dealing with these problems. And one motif appearing in both letters is staying with the truth.

In the fight with unbelief it is about holding fast to truth:

In the 2. Letter to John it says:

*1)The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth, and not only I but all who know the truth, 2)because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us for ever; 3)Grace, mercy and peace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father’s Son, in truth and in love.*

*4)I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children following the truth, just as we have been commanded by the Father. 5)And now I beg you lady, not as though I were writing you a new commandment but the one we have had from the beginning, that we love one another. 6)And this is love, that we follow his commandments, as you have heard from the beginning, that you follow love.*

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> letter of John, one can read:

*1)The elder to the beloved Gajus, whom I love in truth. 10)Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in health; I know that it is well with your soul. 3) For I greatly rejoiced when some of the*

*brethren arrived and testified to the truth of your life, as indeed you do follow the truth. 4)No greater joy can I have than this, to hear that my children follow the truth.*

What we perhaps, in spite of the very different addresses and the content of the letters understand, is, how important is it to stay with the truth.

What, then, is truth?

Pilate already asked Jesus this; and from the beginning it has remained the question of people, to which there are perhaps two answers.: There is the search for truth in philosophy as is faith. This is a substantial difference between Pilate and Jesus. The one, Jesus, speaks of faith, and Pilate talks about general questions, what can actually considered to be truth.

First of all, I want to think about truth in the sense of Pilate, before I come to faith: What is truth?

Recently there was a poll taken, which lie is mostly used by people. I am eager to find out whether you know it. Men respond to the question: “Honey, what do you think about now?” – The answer: Nothing! – And women answer to the question:” Are you angry?” – No!

Why do we find it difficult to simply tell the truth in the most trite things. In a book of advice it said: *The most frequent reason why people lie is to avoid a conflict. It is never nice to get into difficulties, therefore, many people simply use an excuse of a lie. The problem is only that when the lie is discovered, the confrontation cannot be avoided in any case and is mostly much more uncomfortable than if the problem had been discussed immediately in an open and honest manner. A lie does not solve a problem, it is in itself a problem. – The other reason why people are so willing to lie is, to let oneself appear in a better light. Lying is the reason number one, why people lose trust.*

That we all know that, I think. We all have lied before or have become a victim of a lie. We know what it is like when one wishes to appear in a better light and therefore manipulates truth. We also know, how cruel it can be when one suddenly finds out the truth and loses trust.

All of us probably understand why it can be brutal when people are lied to. The Old Testaments tells us about the Ten Commandments, where in one it says: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour. – Some people think that commandment says: You shall not lie. To a certain degree this is true, however, here it is also about the fact that one does not say anything false against anyone before the court. That was particularly important at that time, as the punishments were drastic. People were sentenced to death for adultery. If that were the same today, it would reduce the number of people considerably. The commandment was also important, too, because in the Israel justice system there was no other possibility to investigate the guilt of a person but to listen to witnesses. If these witnesses lied, it was particularly difficult to uncover the truth. Until today, people swear in the courtrooms “to tell the truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God.” However, it happens that lies are told in the courtrooms, that the roof comes down, and often only thanks to modern criminology we have methods such as DNA analysis and parental tests, to be able to find out the truth. Truth is, unfortunately, no longer holy to most people today as it is postulated in the Bible. I think we have understood, how detrimental it is, when one does not say the truth.

If truth is so important, then, and God advises us in the commandments to tell the truth, is truth then something that protects us from problems? It is for us humans better, always and everywhere to tell the truth? There were many who were murdered merely because they told the truth. One has fired people because they have uncovered the truth – that has happened in the so-called “Whistle blower trials” in the UN and also in the Gomery Inquiries here in Canada, where public servants had to accept great disadvantages in this environment.

Truth can be hard. Truth can be brutal. Truth can be exactly what we do not want to hear. When our partner, our doctor, our children tell us the truth, then it is not always as if we are burning to hear it.

We all know that Jesus has once said: "I am the way, the truth and the life." (John 14,6). This is an important sentence for this reason, because he brings a very different TRUTH into play. This is no sentence behind which we can hide, but a sentence which places our entire life into a different light. All our lies and truths, everything that we say, and everything we do not want to hear, what we conceal because of caution and that, which we trumpet out loud, is put into this frame.

The truth which is Jesus makes it possible to unmask as a lie all that which is not described in this truth as a life in love in the second Letter of John. When someone says : "I love you" but does not act accordingly, then he lies. If someone wants to do the 'best' for people, but issues laws which suppress people, then he lies. The truth which is Jesus, the truth of God's love, throws a light on all that which we want to place wrongfully onto others under the cover of love and truth and does absolutely not meet the criterion of God's love. This is one point.

The other is much more important to me, because it opens a opportunity, to deal also with the uncomfortable truths. As long as we have comfort and life in Jesus, as long as we consider him the way, on which we can go, in spite of all disappointments, which can always contain the truth; truth nor lies can destroy us. We can look the truth in the eye and at the same time depend on God, that is, what this means.

What I wanted to tell you this morning is this: It is logical that a lie is bad and has often shorter legs than we think. It never pays to lie, we understand that very well, I think. It is also the case that truth in itself is neither good nor bad, it is, after all, nothing but truth. The question which is decisive for us is on the one side: Do we truly manage to speak the truth? And secondly, do we manage to live with the truth?

The answer for me is unified in the word of Jesus. If he is the way, the truth and the life, then I find the strength to speak the truth, then I find the comfort to also live with the many uncomfortable truth, which we meet daily. I can depend on him, I can review my whole life with him realistically. I can face the lies of life where I pretend to myself, I can become more honest with myself. I can confront others in a loving way with the truth, always carefully remembering, that I may also be wrong and that, contrary to how it seems, the other person says the truth. I can free myself from concealing things just to keep peace, which could add to solve the conflict. As surely as every lie becomes a conflict, so can truth, if one searches for it conscientiously and speaks it in the light and love of God, eliminate every conflict.

I can only touch on most things. I hope that you all have become friends of the truth or are on the way. I know that God rejoices in truth, but I also know, that he is the way to truth, the cause and the goal . Amen.

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