

Sermon on Job 14, 1-6, 12.11.2006

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:

1 'A mortal, born of woman, few of days and full of trouble, 2 comes up like a flower and withers, flees like a shadow and does not last. 3 Do you fix your eyes on such a one? Do you bring me into judgement with you? 4 Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one can. 5 Since their days are determined, and the number of their months is known to you, and you have appointed the bounds that they cannot pass, 6 look away from them, and desist, that they may enjoy, like labourers, their days.

Dear Congregation,

I know that we usually do not like the idea, but death puts things into perspective. This is what we are going to talk about this morning. There are many things which have an effect on our lives in one way or another which we could deny or not think about or simply ignore, but death is an inevitable fact of life, which will come to pass anyway. I heard someone saying: "The success rate of death is still 100 %, one death per person."

Now, I know for a fact that people still do not like to talk about it. In our society we have created what I would label an unhealthy exposure to death. In most cases we only see death in form of a rouged person lying in a casket, nicely dressed, but hardly recognizable to his or her family. 70 % of all Canadians die in a hospital or old age home. I could not find any statistic on how many people die without anyone present.

What also struck me was the comment of someone who has done research on how hospitals deal with the dead. And she said: "The body of a dead person can not leave the hospital the same way as people enter it. It seems to be the document of medical failure when people die. And therefore in fear of losing their good reputation hospitals store the bodies in some morgue in the basement and the bodies are carried out the same way laundry and garbage leave the premises."

This makes me think. Are we afraid of having contact with the dead? It seems so. But as people of faith this is the least thing we have to fear. But we can know that death is conquered, beaten dead by the glorious resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. If there is anything as clear as this as a core message of our faith than this that there will be no such thing that death could be the end to our life. I mean, our earthly life ends with death, that's a given. But we believe that God is going to continue our path we should not be afraid of our own death.

The bible, by the way, is completely relaxed about this topic. Death and the limitations of us humans is talked about many times, without posing any threat. Psalm 90 says for instance: *3 You turn us back to dust, and say, 'Turn back, you mortals.' 4 For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night. 5 You sweep them away; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning; 6 in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.*

Our text from Job states: *1 'A mortal, born of woman, few of days and full of trouble, 2 comes up like a flower and withers, flees like a shadow and does not last.*

There are alone 342 places in the bible where there is talk about dying. I won't quote them, of course, but I want you to be aware that we have lost something which has been accepted as natural.

The bible talks realistically about what will happen. Surely when those texts were written, death was a daily experience in the villages and cities. There was no medical system which fixed anything. People died of completely harmless things, where we today just take a pill, and everything is fine again. But as much as this might be a blessing today, it can also be a curse. We count on the “repair work” doctors do for us. And we are left with the impression that we are invincible. The more devastated we are when things take a wrong turn. When someone dies of the age of seventy these days, we think: “O my God, he’s young!” – 200 years ago the average life expectancy was 38; and in 1930 it was below 60 years of age.

But still you might wonder why it is important to talk about it? Because the emphasis of the bible is different than our perception. When we talk about death, we talk about the end of life, the farewell to people we loved; an event which saddens and grieves us tremendously. When the bible talks about death the message is one for the living, saying: Remember, life is short. Be aware to use your time wisely. Do your best to live accordingly to God’s will, because in the end, judgment will come.”

3 Do you fix your eyes on such a one? Do you bring me into judgement with you?

Those are rhetorical questions, by the way.

Another frightening thought, you may think: Judgment. My understanding is that everyone, regardless, goes before court, where God or Jesus will be the judges. There will be this moment, when we face our deeds and our words, where we have the opportunity to look back and in many ways, and most likely be embarrassed. Just quickly: We all will have a court session upstairs. God is not just saying, okay, go through, eternal life is waiting, but will be pointing out a few things we have done, the good and the bad. This court will hopefully end with an acquittal, because this is what Jesus had paid for on the cross so that we do not need to fear to be burning in hell. But God will be pointing on some things I did, I said, I didn’t do and say: What was that? I will have the full knowledge of the situation and see the truth which by now is clouded through the limitations of my understanding. Now we live in the time of believing, but then we will have the full picture. The way we act here will determine, how long and how painful this court session is going to be.

Psalm 90, Verse 12, says it the best: *So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.* Which basically means: Do not be foolish and think you are not accountable of what you do. Use your time wisely. Think before speaking and before you act.

This is the key in understanding the bible’s interest in talking about death. Death is talked about to urge us to do the best with the time and the resources we have been given. We are asked to wise-up, to do better in the light of a final evaluation which will happen anyway.

Dear congregation, in the turn of events during the church year this reminder is set for November. And this falls together with other events: Christ the King, and Remembrance Day which was yesterday as you know. And I think although it might overwhelm us to cope with all those memories this brings about as well, it is good to have a season where we are forced to deal with all those issues around death and remembrance of the dead.

On Friday the Remembrance Day celebration of the middle school which I serve as school council chair had its Remembrance Day celebration. I have been going to school to attend celebrations like this, because there it makes the most sense for me. School kids need to understand, that wars have terrible impacts on the lives of nations and more individual members of societies. Remembrance Day is remembering the victims of wars and those who have defended freedom, in uniforms on battlefields or as civilians. This year the school had left it to the students to plan out the whole ceremony. Some students, partly dressed in uniform like clothing came forward and quoted experiences and opinions of those, who have fought in wars. It was mind-boggling what they had to say, but what struck me the most was, that the same time they were “performing” kids of

their age actually fight in wars. In the past, until World War II there had been some kind of code of conduct that children, seniors and women were spared from combat, which of course did not mean that they were not victimized in each and every single battle. But see today, there are no barriers. Insurgents kill innocent people, war has taken on the quality of eliminating everyone with any method. Children are slaved to fight. Ideologies have spread to make people do that. We should not forget that every cruelty starts with the thought of supremacy and hatred.

When we mourn those who lost their lives in combat, we can not stop there. When I heard on the news, that we create veterans every day in Afghanistan I could not help but think: How sad! I understand that people want to be proud of their troops when they fight for the right cause, but as a global human community we should be ashamed of ourselves that we create situations in which young men and women, sons, fathers, sisters, husbands and wives are killed.

The weapons are not produced in Afghanistan, nor are the land-mines. Ideologies can only thrive where there is a fertile ground composed of poverty, humiliation and denied right of self-expression.

4 Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one can. 5 Since their days are determined, and the number of their months is known to you, and you have appointed the bounds that they cannot pass, 6 look away from them, and desist, that they may enjoy, like labourers, their days.

Job wishes a few moments of happiness, in which he does not have to think about the meaning of life and death. I understand his wish, and I am pretty sure you feel the same way. We want to switch of the TV, we do not want to be held accountable for what is going on this world, and we surely want to enjoy our life without those burdening responsibility for us and for others.

Job's wish was denied. God talks back to Job 24 chapters later and makes undisputable clear in which world we live in. Job does something which I consider to be the smartest thing he could do: He repents and accepts God as the ultimate power. God therefore accepts Job's repentance and blesses him more than ever before.

Dear Congregation,

Our wisdom starts with turning to God, starts with repentance. In the knowledge that we do not live forever and will have to give account of our life, we should seek ways that we do our best to bring about peace and to share the love we have received from God.

I hope we learn our lesson before it is too late. It should not be fear which drives us to do better, but the understanding, that we should not live our life in accordance to the will of God. Amen.

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