

(John 20,19-23 and Gen 32, 22-32)

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ Jesus

It is springtime! And I hope you have had already this morning or you will have this afternoon some time to walk around and enjoy all the blossoming and greening everywhere. I did ‚bath‘ in the woods cycling on my way to this service. Bright daylight. And so we are prepared for the biblical texts of this first Sunday after Eastersunday, because they both talk about night experiences.

The Gospel of John 20 starts in the time of late evening when the disciples of Jesus have locked the door up, locked themselves up in fear after the traumatic experience of Christs crucifixion and death.

The preaching text for today from Genesis 32 lasts the whole night until early morning.

I assume we all know different kinds of „dark night experiences“ when we have lived through the darkness of the night. The experience of a sleepless night: hour after hour I lie awake, the night stretches endlessly, armies of worries descend on me, I am defenseless from the flood of my feelings, shadows settle over my thoughts and my soul, small problems grow big and circle around and around. ...

The night has many faces. It is a time of danger, fear and nightmares, inner struggles and powerlessness. It is as well very often a moment of transformation and of a deep encounter with God and with the holy spirit who wants us to live. Maybe you know that old church hymn: „the middle of the night is the beginning of a new day“.

So let us at the middle of the day give these two biblical night-texts a closer look and what they might want to tell us for today. And as we live in Easter times we can even do so with the perspective of easter and ressurection as light that shines in and through all darkness.

I start with the gospel of John. In the rhythm of the church year we are just going back one week, Eastersunday evening.

What is the situation: The disciples are devastated and without orientation: Jesus, their master, teacher, friend, first example of Gods grace and nearness is dead. It is scary, it is like the ground pulled away from under your feet. They are frighened and fear for their lives as well. The lock themselves, probably their mind, soul and body was like frozen and blocked.

No comfort and help in sight. And then Jesus comes ‚out of the blue‘. He comes and great them with „Peace be with you“. And - because we need as humans, and especially when we are blocked not just words and something for the mind but also experience it with our senses and our body - he shows them as a sign his wounds of the past. Immediately they are realeased and overjoyed. The past ist gone. Right away they receive another strong sign for the presence and the future. He „breathes on them and says: Receive the holy spirit.“

Jesus enables them - and I think I can say as well enables *us* as humble believers and disciples of Jesus – to open up again, from fear to hope, from circling just around own often toxic thoughts to hope and clear sight what is around us, who needs us.

Jesus even goes one step further: He entrusts his disciples with the gift to forgive, forgive oneself and forgive others and empowers them to discern which is one of the most difficult human tasks and issues ever: what can be forgiven and what may be not forgiven on a human level.

So this text is for me like a vademecum, something to remember and to think of in dark night hours: Jesus wants to come to us, even through our looked doors and sends us Peace. He provides us with the gift, the

boon of the holy spirit.

Or as the Psalms sing, e.g. Psalm 30: „After an evening of tears comes a morning full of rejoicing.“ Yes, every morning there is a breath of resurrection. So what about to start every day with that thought and experience, that every morning a new beginning (as Dietrich Bonhoeffer pointed out)?!

These thoughts are quite fitting for the name of our Sunday today: „Quasimodogeniti“. It is Latin for: „like the newborn babies“. In the old church Easter Time was the time of baptism and as Christians we are born anew and can start from the beginning seeing the world with new eyes, Gods caring and forgiving eyes. We are entitled to learn anew and again to trust, to forgive and be guided by the spirit.

Our second night text, the basis for the sermon is from the old, the first testament is adding another perspective. The narration out of the long story of Jakob is a quite well known scene, since centuries depicted in drawings and paintings.

It starts again with the experience of loneliness and being exposed. The later so called „Erzvater“ (patriarch) Jakob finds himself in a difficult situation. He has betrayed his older brother Esau, stealing the fathers blessing.

He has to live with this guilt and knows somehow as well that God has chosen him to do good and to fulfill God commands, to enlarge the flock of believers. After long years he prepares for the first encounter with his brother. He has to cross a river, like a separating line, and he sends his family and all his possessions and remains alone stripped of every safety. And then someone fights with him. The whole night.

There are many different, psychological and theological interpretations for that scene. Who is this „someone“? One meaning is: he is fighting with the divine side inside him, others say he is fighting with his own dark shadow. However he has a very deep experience, he fights with God. And Jacob is not giving up, not resigning, he remains standing, he wants to survive and to live. In the end he has changed and he gets the blessing, this time for real.

Jacob is an example, also for us today, to cling to God even if it is difficult, not to let him go, to expect and to hope that God fills us even in guilt or fear-ridden times again with the breath of the holy spirit, brings back hope and joy.

During the centuries there are different testimonies of these night experiences and the wrestling with God (and devil). One famous testimony is Martin Luther, he called them „Anfechtungen“ (Trials). He shared that there are moments where faith, and even the deep faith of a Martin Luther, falls into a deep crisis and the relationship with God is experienced as dry and empty and dark. But again and again Luther reminded himself of all the biblical night-experiences, of people going through these kind of crisis again and again. And how they came through these nights and overcame them by integrating weakness and pain. And in the end he understood and this is part of our protestant belief: God is not a God to fear, not a God just to admire and to worship. God wrestles with us, for us.

As Christians, as people of God with sometimes just a little faith, with wounded pasts and many fears, these biblical texts testify not to give up, to be open to be found by Jesus Christ.

Our world today is a world full of fears. There are so many fears in each and everyone, and there are fears concerning the future of our earth and the climate crisis, about war and injustice, and that mankind repeats errors of the past again and again. We celebrate Easter to celebrate that hope and love overcomes the power of death and all deadly powers and that we are invited to follow the steps towards the power of life.

After this encounter in the night at John 20 the disciples opened the locks of their houses and their hearts.

They got out and proclaimed the good message, the gospel and started to gather, to reconcile and comfort, with the courage to live a life carried by Gods love. After the encounter at the river Jabbok Jacob could meet his brother, could ask for forgiveness and move on with inner peace.

„The middle of the night is the beginning of a new day" sings an old hymn. Each Sunday is a realisation of Easter, symbolizing transformation and the beginning of new life. So let us in our personal life, in our communities and our society be a sign of Gods love, of the light that shines in the darkness. God has marked and blessed us – in dark nights and bright daylight. „If you but trust in God that guides us“ – let us now sing this hymn all together.

*The peace of God, which is higher than all our understanding,
keep our minds awake and strengthen our love for one another.*

Amen.