

Sermon about John 19, 16-30 on Good Friday 2025 in Antwerp (I)

Blessing: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

Bible: 16 So he delivered him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, 17 and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. 18 There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. 19 Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." 20 Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. 21 So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" 22 Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." 23 When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, 24 so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." So the soldiers did these things, 25 but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" 27 Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. 28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." 29 A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. 30 When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Opener: Dear sisters and brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ, as a student in Germany you have the opportunity to work as a so-called 'scientific helper' at the university. You are then assigned to a professor or institute and do auxiliary work, such as research work, getting books, making copies or maintaining the institute library. I once had a student job like that. When we were planning our Advent celebration at the institute, I was responsible for putting together a list of Advent carols. And as many of these familiar songs have many verses, I naturally had to make a selection. I did this to the best of my theological knowledge and conscience and, of course, influenced by my piety. I was promptly criticised by a fellow student that I had only chosen the difficult verses with suffering, humiliation of the Lord and redemption etc. and not the beautiful Christmas verses.

Part One: We know that the Advent season and the Passion have many connections. Both seasons are about the hope in the coming Lord for our redemption. And this culminates in the cross. It is also unbearable when we really look at the Passion story. Here, someone is put to death in the most terrible way. And completely unjustly. And we Christians testify that it was not just any good person, but God himself. - And it is precisely this that has been incomprehensible to many people since the beginning. Why does it have to be like this? It bothers us because it challenges us and our way of life.

In the Gospel, Jesus himself testifies several times that it really 'must' be this way. It is apparently the only way to save us humans from our self-inflicted hell. We cannot escape the cycle of doubt, of morbid self-centredness and the feeling of falling short on our own. We cannot escape the cycle of resentment and marginalisation. We cannot create and maintain peace on our own. We cannot manage to love unconditionally and listen to God alone. That is the reality, and in terms of the whole of history and humanity, it is hardly less terrible than what

happened on the cross. If it were different, our human coexistence would look different - even in our own families, in our community and church.

Part Two: But now the mission of this 'it must' with no alternative is coming to an end. And it is no longer necessary to simply leave it as incomprehensible as before. At and under the cross, it becomes clear why 'it must'. Here it finally becomes clear why God goes this way in and with Jesus Christ. Our faith is not about giving and taking, as in a religion. It is not about offering anything to the deity in order to be able to take a small step up the ladder of salvation. God and our Christian faith are about relationship and love - first and foremost from God to his creatures. Jesus does it all alone. He is and remains Lord of what happens. He goes first, he lets himself be nailed to the cross, the clothes are distributed, he lets himself be given to drink because it says so in the Scriptures, this says because God wants it that way. God's justice and righteousness have never ceased to reign, even if it looks that way to us. Isn't that comforting to know?

Part Three: And God creates relationships even unto death and cares for his people even to the point of self-sacrifice. This is the greatest miracle of all in the Gospels, because this love and self-giving in order to establish and maintain a relationship against all odds is unthinkable and impossible for us humans. This is wonderfully depicted in Jesus' one cloak, which is not divided even after Jesus' death, but remains in one piece. It becomes a symbolic cloak of protection for us. We can discover it from time to time in the pastor's chasuble and be reminded of it. In Jesus Christ we find another world. A world for everyone. A world in which everyone is accepted and protected and is not ultimately divided and torn apart by the powers of the world.

Part Four: Jesus cares in love to the end and beyond. He builds relationships with us and for us with each other when he points his disciple and his mother towards each other. He creates a space for the future for those who are tired,

disappointed and have failed. He directs the downcast eyes towards the others and thus creates a task and a goal, but also new living space. Because family should be a living and protective space. Take care of each other. Be family - because you both belong to me, to the family of God.

Aim: And then Jesus goes to his death in order to weave the threads of a living relationship there too. From that moment on, no place and no condition is far from God. Even the depths of death are illuminated by the light of the world. This gives us hope, because we are not lost. This is an example to us, because we have a task here. It gives us strength, because in this faith we can at least begin to live differently with love and self-giving.

And in the end, it is no longer 'it must be done', but 'it is done'.

Blessing: The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.