

Sermon about Luke 22, 47-53 on Oculi 2023 in Brussels (V)

Greeting: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Bible: 47 While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, 48 but Jesus said to him, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" 49 And when those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" 50 And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. 51 But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. 52 Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? 53 When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness."

Prayer: Merciful father, bless your word to us. In Jesus name we pray. (Amen.)

Sermon: 1. *Unsecure twilight:* Twilight. Is it already more dark or still light? Will the darkness triumph or the light? Is it kiss or betrayal? Violence or healing? - We stand on the threshold, on the edge, on a knife's edge. "Crisis" is what the Greek language calls it - crisis is the moment of inevitable change in things, a turning point - for better or worse will have to be seen. Where do I stand in this fateful confusion, this mix-up? Will we manage to gain distance and get an overview? Or is that neither possible nor wanted?

2. *Good Friday at the horizon with which message for me?:* Today, barely four weeks before Good Friday, we are brought close to the cross. It smells of the sweat of fear in danger of death. Our passage for today is silent about what has gone before: the disciples in the garden do not manage to stay awake and pray. And then, just two verses earlier, it says of Jesus after his prayer to his heavenly Father in anticipation of approaching death (Lk 22:43-44), " And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in agony he prayed

more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground." Good Friday is on the horizon. Things are getting serious. I feel restlessness in pondering this word of Holy Scripture. Where am I in this? Where is my place in this story, this yet decisive step towards death and resurrection. Martin Luther told his friend and barber Master Peter Beskendorf, in response to his question about how to pray properly, that when he read a Bible passage he asked himself what teaching it contained and what God was asking of him personally in terms of that teaching. This is followed by thanksgiving, confession and prayer in the horizon of this teaching. - But what teaching is contained in this so sombre passage? Where can it lead me?

3. *What actually happens here?:* Let's try to unravel the matter from behind. Jesus confronts his persecutors for coming secretly in the dark instead of arresting him publicly in the temple in the light. Are they not so sure of their case after all? If they are in the right, why hide? It is surely not a misunderstood respect for the temple. How many people confess God in the light on Sundays in church and are no longer recognisable as Christians in everyday life, disappearing into the shadows of everyday life? How is it with me? Life in the grey, on the threshold between light and darkness. - And then there is the matter of the sword. Wasn't it Jesus himself who just now (Lk 22:36), before they went into the garden, asked the disciples to buy a bag and a sword? Jesus' objection is not even a clear rejection of any violence. He says: "No more of this!" Was it okay up to this point? Jesus does not condemn violence, but interrupts it. Anyway, the violence here hits the "poorest soul", the slave of the high priest, who may not have anything against Jesus and is certainly not there voluntarily. And further violence would only lead to disaster anyway. Like the whole scene, it remains in limbo. On the one hand, the church should not be easy prey to persecution. It may arm itself. Jesus seems to allow defence and

fortitude, even with weapons. But it remains the case that it is violence and hits the wrong person far too quickly. Healing of the enemy must always be thought of and participated in, even at the stroke of the sword. The task remains to permanently question oneself and the action, not to find easy and general answers. How topical the Holy Scriptures are once again! Not an old, dusty book with ideas that have nothing to do with my time and my life. - Lastly, Judas. He seems to have changed sides. Or only seemingly? It says "he drew near to Jesus to kiss him." Did he kiss him or not? Luke, as a good narrator, again leaves it in the unknown, in the twilight. Luke's account can be read as Jesus stopping him at the last moment. Jesus stops him from abusing the symbol of love, trust and affection. One commentator writes: "As if he [Jesus] wanted to protect the friend from himself and, if one interprets it benevolently, save at least a piece of the friendship: "Judas", he addresses him, "would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" - that is not a question. That's a stop sign." - Much has been thought and written about the role of Judas. In the past, he went from being a traitor to the type of the evil Jew who brought Jesus to the cross and became a cipher for anti-Semitism from the Middle Ages to its deepest point in Nazi Germany. In recent decades, theology has become more cautious, also in the knowledge of early church views. Why, we believe and confess, did Jesus have to die? What would have happened if Judas had not handed Jesus over into the hands of the executioners? Here too, old beliefs believed to be true become blurred. Is Judas doing the worst here or is he part of the most necessary? Twilight time and again. And again the question, where am I in all this drama? - How are my kisses? What is hidden behind my forehead and in my heart when I approach people to kiss them - physically or figuratively? Lastly, it must be noted that the word used here does not actually mean "betray", but "hand over" or also "deliver". The Apostle Paul uses the

same word in the passage that is so highly significant for us, in which he delivers the words of institution of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:23): "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed..." and so on. What I have passed on to you, handed down to you. Judas as the deliverer of the Lord? Another shade. And in the light of Easter, in which we also stand, many things in the world suddenly look different. Our Christian faith does not tempt us to quick and easy answers. It may even make life and decisions more difficult. But it also makes us more honest and sustainable, even with the knowledge of not knowing.

4. Jesus looks at us: Twilight. A moment on the threshold between darkness and light. There are situations like this in every life. We call it a crisis and it is not clear how things will turn out. Sometimes it is also a defeat, at least at the beginning. It is the hour of the enemies upon us. Perhaps even more than that, when even the power of darkness, the devil seems to win a partial victory. Yes, we are not necessarily spared that. Then questions arise. Lord, why? Then we want to strike with the sword. Sometimes perhaps even at God himself, whom we blame for the situation. But I see - and this may be the teaching in the sense of Martin Luther - even then Jesus remains Lord of the situation. He has eyes and words for everyone in this scene that are not final words. He even heals and keeps an eye on the friend gone astray. Jesus Christ has you in view, even when you are more in the dark right now, self-chosen or not. He holds out his stop sign to you, but also shows you the way back into the light. He knows that it is not always easy and that it cannot always be "either or". But as Lord of the situation, he offers you to always look to him and to go with him wherever he goes. Oculi, my eyes on the Lord! We are not alone.

Blessing: And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.