

**Service of farewell from Jerusalem for Propst Wolfgang Schmidt  
Church of the Redeemer, 04.09.2019**

Psalm 103:1-8

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!  
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,  
who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,  
who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and  
mercy,  
who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.  
The Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.  
He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.  
The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast  
love.

Dear brothers and sisters,

I would like to end my years in Jerusalem with a hymn of praise! " Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits". At the beginning of the service we heard Psalm 104 in German and Arabic. Sacred Scripture lends us appropriate words, lends us the language which, in our gratitude, directs us to God, points us to Him: He is the source and goal of all gratitude.

In reciting this Psalm, we join in a singing and praying for which the faithful for centuries, for millennia, have used the same words. "Bless the Lord, O my soul!" Just as the stones of the Via Dolorosa have been trodden by the feet of thousands of pilgrims over the centuries, just as the paths of faith and devotion have left their mark to the ground, this Psalm has been prayed in hundreds of languages since time immemorial, has passed through thousands of mouths, through thousands of hearts, has emerged from countless souls: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits".

Whoever expresses his thanks in these words of the biblical tradition will become part of that broad stream of people, Jews and Christians who address the good that happened to them in their lives: in everything and through

everything and behind everything it is the goodness of God that gives us all gifts.

But that which makes the individual's heart overflow is at the same time something very personal. It is the joy in my life - the love of God, which I feel very personally as a great blessing: A child is born to me. I have overcome an illness. A debt was paid off. My profession makes me happy. I experience trust that makes me happy.

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!” I want to end my years in Jerusalem with this hymn of praise! Anette, my wife and I, we have received such a blessed time in this city and this country out of God's hand! Such an abundance of life was given to us throughout the past seven years, which we were finally allowed to live and work here. How many people have placed their trust in us: strangers with whom we began to talk after the daily midday prayer in Redeemer Church, pilgrims who reached the Church of the Redeemer at the end of a long pilgrimage, seekers who wanted to give their lives a new direction, visitors from Germany who came again and again and found familiar contacts in us; the many who worked together under the umbrella of "Evangelisch in Jerusalem", sometimes only for a few weeks as volunteers or interns, sometimes for a year as vicars, and others who were there before us and will be there beyond our time. We are grateful for all the signs of collegiality that we were able to experience - also from the side of the EKD in Hannover and the Arab sister church ELCJHL. We were able to put confidence in many in our congregation and in the brothers and sisters in faith in other churches, in the Dormitio above all. But also in the other Christian denominations and Churches in our beloved Jerusalem we experienced much appreciation and cordial friendship and a great richness of beliefs and liturgical life! And how wonderful that we were able to experience all this together as a couple, that my wife supported and shaped this work from the bottom of her heart! I am deeply grateful to our Father in heaven for this!

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." What we experienced in Jerusalem is unforgettable. But the Psalm verse does not mean it just when it speaks about forgetting. The Bible wants to encourage us to make gratitude a basic feature of our lives. Sometimes it is forgetting, but often it is simply

overlooking the things and events that are given to us. Often worries and concerns become overpowering, keeping us under their spell. Dissatisfaction increases our mood to criticize others so that we lose sight of God's small and large gifts, leading us to a lifestyle where we hardly perceive anything for which we could be grateful. We have little regard for the fact that we wake up healthy from our sleep in the morning, that we can help ourselves from the fridge at noon, or that we can go to church on Sundays unhindered and without fear of anything. Overlooking the good, forgetting, plunges the soul into poverty.

Therefore "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." I want to end my time in Jerusalem with this hymn of praise! And this also because the verses that now follow lead beyond what has been said so far. For it says: "... who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy!" In addition to all what makes me grateful, there are, of course, other things. The seven years in the Holy Land are also a time of neglect. In these years I also became guilty: I think of situations in which I could not do justice to my counterpart; I have to think of injustice that I did not call by name, remember false restraint or unnecessary exaggerations. When my soul turns to the merciful God with the words of the Psalm, it includes the certainty that he is rich in forgiveness. "...who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy." Trusting in God's grace and mercy, I do not need to ignore the shadows of my ministry as a provost in the Church of the Redeemer. I ask forgiveness from everyone. I ask God for forgiveness.

Dear brothers and sister! Psalm 103 lends me the words to turn to God in my thanksgiving. The Psalm makes God's will for forgiveness and reconciliation shine. And thirdly these Psalm verses uphold hope, hope for the future of this country. Without this hope, it would be even harder for us to turn our backs on Jerusalem: " The Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed." The conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, the violence and injustice that plague so many people here in the region, was like a constant rush in all the weeks and years that we were at home here. It has never been quiet. The Church of the Redeemer in East Jerusalem is a sensitive place. Here we live in close solidarity with the native Palestinian Christians on one hand.

On the other hand the relationship to Judaism is theologically fundamental for us and in our historical and political responsibility we are especially connected with the genesis of the State of Israel with everything that this means for Palestinians and Jews until today. This provokes contrasts that are often difficult to endure. "The Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed." That is our hope for this country, for this city, for this region. We will uphold this hope and make it strong, even after our way back to Germany.

"The Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel". In his revelation on Mount Sinai, God revealed his standards of righteousness and justice. What God let Moses know did not remain a secret. The tablets of the Ten Commandments through Judaism and Christianity have begun a triumphal march throughout the world. In a unique way, they protect people from the encroachments of their fellow human beings - if one accepts them and brings them into life. As Christians, we share with Judaism the revolutionary ideas of righteousness and justice. The admonitions of the prophets are still relevant even after thousands of years. Righteousness and justice have become attributes of God in the Old Testament. "The Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed." For all! The Psalm stands on the side of those who suffer injustice, no matter who they are, because that is the side where God the merciful takes his stand.

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Amen