

## Xmas Eve Sermon 2016

„...the people in darkness have seen a great light...” Isaiah 9:2-9

Sisters and brothers,  
I don't know when you last watched the news or read the newspaper,  
but just picture the following scene:  
A couple with a new born baby walking through the ruins  
of what once was a booming and buzzing beautiful city...  
The land lies devastated.  
Years of war have worn it out.  
Enemy forces from all sides have bombed and burnt it.  
The fields are barren.  
Bushes and trees are bare and leafless.  
No sign of human life as far as one can see.  
The few who've survived the horror  
have fled and hidden in neighbouring regions.

From far away noises can be heard.  
Tramping boots,  
roaring voices,  
aggressive laughter...  
a group of soldiers come down the narrow road.  
They are the victors.  
The battle's over,  
the country taken,  
the people captured.  
The marks of their cruel business  
can still be seen on the soldiers' clothes:  
blood-stained coats,  
dirty boots,  
and weapons in use just a few moments before.  
Their tramping steps are thundering down the street and –  
suddenly come to a halt:  
a group of starving people  
block the soldiers' way.  
At their head a young man and an even younger woman  
with a silently weeping tiny little baby.

“Get out of the way,” the soldiers shout,  
but the poor folk remain standing in the middle of the road.  
Fear in their faces, but firm in their stand...

The voices of the soldiers become calmer,  
their steps slower...and slower.  
Then they stop.  
Stand still and look at the miserable people.

“Why don't you let us pass?” the soldiers ask.

“...because of the baby,” the woman almost whispers.  
“Because of the child!  
It is just born.  
It is still so small.  
It is our only hope.”

“Children are special,” the young man adds.  
“Children are the future.  
They can bring peace and show us new ways.  
They can rebuild the land and plant the fields.  
They can reconcile us, and show us how to love...”

After a long silence...  
the soldiers take off their boots,  
unbutton their army jackets,  
throw their weapons down on the floor  
and burn the lot.  
With bare feet,  
and together with the local people,  
they start building up the ruins and working the land...  
And whenever they look up from the work of their hands  
they can see the shadows of the past disappearing  
and joy of life flooding the air.

I know so well that you cannot see the last part of my story on the television news. This is not what the media show.  
This is not how our world works, is it:  
an end of oppression and the beginning of mutual understanding because of a tiny new born baby, homeless, powerless, dispossessed, carried through the middle of nowhere, seeking a better place, longing for a better future...  
This is not at all how the world works, how the powerful think and the mighty act.  
But this is how Christmas works:  
the time of the year full of visions of light  
and dreams of peace and joy for all those in the darkness of human life.

After the story of the birth in the stable the reading from Isaiah tonight is one of the most powerful images of Christmas:  
the world cannot be changed by power and might,  
but by a small child – helpless, humble and innocent.

Isaiah paints pictures of light and hope for liberation and peace.  
Pictures beyond the achieving of human beings.  
Pictures expressing the dreams and visions of millions of people of faith throughout the history of humankind.  
Pictures of Christmas throughout the centuries.  
In the people’s darkness there shall be light.  
The yokes of the enslaved will be broken,

the rods of the oppressors taken away.  
The disarming birth of a divine child  
will forever make all the difference!

Christmas is not just something to be celebrated in our hearts and families.  
Christmas has got a lot to do with the whole world  
and the needs and suffering of all humankind.

Isaiah's message is meant for all people. It is highly political.  
It does not only speak of light in the darkness of people's hearts,  
but of light in the darkness of violence, war, oppression and cruelty.

It needs to be heard in the palaces and white houses,  
in the parliaments and on the executive floors.  
It needs to be heard in the slums of Nairobi,  
in the ruins of Aleppo,  
in the prisons of Istanbul  
and in hiding places of the persecuted all over the world.  
It is a message against the slaughtering of innocent children,  
their parents and grandparents,  
against the disgraceful production of weapons  
and the inhuman striving for power.

Christmas leads to Jesus, born in darkness to bring the great light.  
It leads to the people who live in darkness –  
waiting for him and waiting for us.

A child will be born... to make all the difference.  
A child will be born... for the peace of all.  
This is the overwhelming message at Christmas.

This is something only God could think of:  
so different from human planning and thinking.  
Liberation and peace through the birth of a small and helpless child  
who has got no power or means of defence at all.  
God relinquishes power  
and is found in the fragile and vulnerable body of a baby...  
The kingdom of peace will come through a child –  
disarmingly defenceless.  
Isaiah's mighty visions of the end of violence and oppression are coming true  
in the birth of a tiny human being, the beginning of something entirely new...

The life of our world lies in the hands of someone  
as helpless and powerless as a new born baby.  
And all authority rests upon these innocent small shoulders  
promising light not darkness,  
life not death,  
peace not war,

and freedom instead of oppression.

Isaiah has shared his most precious dream with the people who live in darkness...  
and he shares it with us.

When the Messiah comes, his victory will be permanent.

He will establish a kingdom that will have no end.

In a way that Isaiah could never have dreamed,

we can apply these words to Jesus.

He is the wonderful counsellor,

the mighty God,

the everlasting father,

the prince of peace.

We know this.

We can live according to this knowledge.

We can be light for each other.

And we know the child that can make all the difference,

we are acquainted with his way from the manger to the cross

always knowing that such is the only way to light and peace for our world.

Christmas is a challenge to work for a new way of life,

...for light for the world and God's peace for all to come true.

Christmas is a chance to affirm our faith anew:

I believe that Christmas is more

than a time for parties and ornaments;

it is a time for remembering Christ

and the incarnation of

God's love for human beings.

I believe there are gifts

more important than the ones

under the Christmas tree,

such as the things

we teach our children,

the way we share ourselves with friends,

and the determination with which we set about

reshaping the world in our time.

I believe that the finest carols

are often sung by the poorest voices,

from hearts made warm

by the wonder of the season.

I believe in the angels' message

that we should not be afraid,

that the child of Bethlehem is able

to overcome all darkness.

I believe in prayer and quietness  
as a way of appropriating Christmas  
that if I wait in peace,  
I will experience the presence  
of the one born in the stable,  
for he lives today  
as surely as he lived then.

I believe in going away from Christmas  
as a changed person.  
I want to be different  
when these days are past.  
And I believe God will help me.  
Amen.