



Newsletter of the English-Speaking United Methodist Congregation in Munich: January 2021

A New Mother of Faith

Sisters and brothers, believe it or not: I found a new mother of faith. She only is mentioned in one verse of the Old Testament (1 Chronicles 7: 24), but her story can be fascinating. So, why not begin the New Year with a new hero?

Her name is Sheerah. She did what no other woman in the Old Testament did. She built cities. She built three cities: Upper and Lower Beth-Horon, & Uzzan-Sheerah, which means “listen to Sheerah”.

There is this one verse, but we discover more when we read carefully & between the lines. We know Sheerah’s family, her grandfather & great-grandfather. She was a granddaughter of Joseph. Joseph, the favourite son of Jacob, the great-grandson of Abraham; Joseph, who saved his family and all of Egypt from famine. He married an Egyptian woman: Asenath. Together they had two sons: Ephraim and Mannaseh. Ephraim had sons who caused him much pain. Not only did they die, but they died committing a crime. Ephraim was devastated, and after a long time of mourning decided to carry on with life as best as he could. He and his wife had another child, Beriah. Ephraim named his late born, his youngest son, “weeping”. Life from then on held only sadness for him. Pessimism took over. And in all that we find this one verse about a daughter of Ephraim. With her, a new story begins: a story of hope, of building up, of building new, a story of optimism. Instead of remaining trapped & caught in this awful family tragedy, Sheerah escapes its grip & says No. “No, I am not letting that define me! I am building something new!” She did not let the family pain enslave her! She had a vision and made it come true.

Sheerah built three cities. Two of the three cities, Lower Beth-Horon and Upper-Beth-Horon were

on a hillside, one high above the other. Their names mean “House of the Shelter.” Her cities are safe places! The third city is Uzzan-Sheerah which means “Listen to Sheerah”. I guess, only a famous & highly respected woman can name a town after herself.



Lower Beth-Horon

So, I imagine Sheerah as she has work to do. You don’t just build a city, whether you are a woman or a man, without planning or preparation. But a question first: How did Sheerah become a city-builder? Was it her childhood dream? Maybe her family had nurtured it? Or maybe her family & friends, neighbours & strangers told her she was crazy. “You can’t build a city. What makes you think you can do that? What city was ever built by a woman? Go get yourself a man & have children. Your people aren’t city-builders. Your people are cattle farmers. You can’t do it!” If there were No-sayers, Sheerah didn’t listen to them.

Sheerah started building. She had a dream, she had a plan, she had a vision, she had a calling, she had a commission. She was born to do this work. It was in her bones & in her blood, in her heart & in her

hands. And it didn't matter if nobody else understood. It didn't matter what other women or men were saying. Somehow, she learned to design & build cities. She chose the sites for her cities, taking into account water & other natural resources with an eye to defence. Maybe she had to go back to the drawing board over & over again. It can be hard to give shape to your ideas. I imagine Sheerah not giving up when it got hard. She had to hire & supervise contractors & subcontractors. She had to manage her workforce. She couldn't be everywhere on the building sites, so she had to appoint others to share in the responsibility. Since it was in ancient Israel, it may have mattered to some folk that the chief architect & project manager was a woman. But God has been using women to build, lead and change the world so often.



Beth-Horon

Sheerah built her cities not alone. She needed a whole community to get the work done. Her dream wasn't hers alone. Others had to be inspired through it & impressed with it. It takes loads of people to raise a city, to clear the land, to quarry the stone, to transport the building materials. There had to be others who could see the vision, who trusted the woman with the plan. I don't imagine that Sheerah stood around giving orders all the time. I see her tying up her hair, rolling up her sleeves & doing the work with her own hands. When you are giving birth to a vision, when you are making your own dreams come true, when you are doing what God called you to do, you don't mind getting a little dirty, you don't mind putting in the hard work & long hours.

Sheerah had to build her city in the right order. She couldn't start with the wallpaper & the flower arrangements. She had to start in the dirt, had to lay her foundation, had to build her walls. Those walls had to hold. They were still at war with some of the

surrounding nations. The place had to be safe. Maybe she built her own house first; maybe one for her parents, one for her brother's family, houses for her workers & other folk. When she finished building her first city, Sheerah didn't retire. She built two more. Maybe she never married or gave birth. Maybe she preferred to become the mother of cities. Her name lives on in the Bible through her cities, the work of her hands.

The Bible tells us of two of Sheerah's cities involved in fighting and war. And when it had come to the worst God stood up and fought for them. We read in the book of Joshua how full of violence & war the old times in Israel were. A battle here, a murder there, a conquest one day, a defeat the next. Nothing was ever stable or safe. (Jos 10). And in this instability and mess we find a note that God stepped in & fought for his people. This is of course an image of God that we do not favour today. My God is no warrior, my God is love, nothing else but love. I am infused by this love, I am surrounded by it, carried through by it and live in it. God's love is my universe. That helps me believe, especially after the chaos of 2020 and at the beginning of 2021.

But the old Israelites needed something else. They needed a fighter at their side who gave them courage & strength. They needed those stories of a mighty warrior God and all the battles they fought with him victoriously because in real life they were almost always the losers. Research proves that the stories in Joshua have no historical evidence. Jericho was never taken by the Israelites. They simply moved in with the people who were already there & mixed with them and lived with them. In their storytelling however they needed the power and the victories to give them identity and strength. It is the storytelling of a people that was constantly conquered and oppressed. A plaything of the mighty nations surrounding them. The Israelites were dreaming of greatness and a God who fought for them.

But back to the story: It also has this image of a God who listens. God listened to Sheerah, to her hopes and prayers for her cities and the people in them. When Sheerah's cities were in trouble, God came to rescue. God saved Sheerah's work. And today, more than 3000 years after Sheerah built her cities, the remains of Upper Beth-Horon and Lower Beth-Horon are still visible in Palestine.

Let us take Sheerah's story as an image of our lives. What dreams do we have? What unusual and nonorthodox ideas and visions do we have? What are we building? What are we building for God? What are we building for our community? What are we building for those who come after us? What legacy will we leave behind for the people of God to build on? And how are we building? Do we have a plan?

Whatever plan or vision you have, build on your foundation. Build your city. Raise the walls; let the towers touch the skies. Fill it with your folk: family and friends, neighbours and strangers. And when your city comes into danger God will stay with you and strengthen your hands to repair and build again. God will stay with you, listen to you and help you survive and carry on.

With this text Sheerah's story comes out from oblivion into new life. Let's remember it and write our own stories. May they not be hidden and forgotten. May we too, as Sheerah was, be women and men of faith who lead the way, as we dream of a better year 2021. Let us build the world as God intended it to be. Wishing you tons of energy and strength for this.

Yours, Pastor Christine.

Glimpses from the Peace Church Life in December...

By Pastor Christine

On the 1st Sunday in Advent, a group of Peace Church friends met in the church to produce the Peace Church Christmas and New Year's Eve videos. We had intended to do both films in one afternoon. But we did not manage it. After the Christmas video message was done, we were kind of "done" too, and decided to film again the next Sundays. So, on 6 December another film project took place. Both videos are beautiful. A big thank you to all who helped making them! The biggest thank you of course goes to Izzy who put the film material together and helped it become the final version.

In Advent the noon time and the evening services had a different liturgy. We chose Advent texts and songs and enjoyed them very much on the first two Advent Sunday. After this singing was not permitted anymore, and we had to live with the music alone. On one occasion kids and adults

moved through the church and danced to the music – all wearing masks of course. We lit many more candles than we otherwise do, because it gave us something festive and joyful to do – almost a bit like a sacrament.

A fantastic Advent- and Christmas Liturgy Book had been put together by Kat Wagner and Pastor Christine. Many families reported to us how much they loved using it in their homes.

Another much loved project was the PeaceCast. One little meditation or prayer or cookie recipe or musical contribution or thoughts on the day... They were published every day from 1 to 25 December. The idea was to have something a bit like an Advent Calendar: a treat every day. The idea had come up in the Council on Ministries. Nico and Izzy made it come true.

The Homework Club was kept going as long as we possibly could. Since it offers support with the students' schoolwork, we were still allowed to meet in December. With strict rules of course, with masks covering our faces, and with fresh air every 40 minutes even though on some Fridays it was bitterly cold outside. We are very grateful to the young people who are teaching the students, and of course to Cathy Williams who "spoils" us with the most delicious lunch bags. She packed a bag for every student, things homemade and individually packed, so we could all sit with 1,50 metres distance to each other and enjoy lunch. We are not sure how we will be able to continue after the school holidays. We promise to let the students know and to find ways of supporting them even when we cannot meet in person.

The Thursday Evening Bible Study for Women has begun meeting online, too. It feels strange, but it is certainly better than waiting with our reading of Catherine Keller's interesting and challenging book "On the Mystery" until the Covid-19 pandemic is over.



We all felt sad that in December there was no way of meeting with church kids and doing the fun Advent stuff like baking and producing little Christmassy crafts. We so hope that in the course of this year we will be able to offer more projects for kids and youth.

Confirmation Class is a teaching program with a book. Pastor Christine sends out worksheets from the individual chapters of “Manna and Mercy”. The kids fill in their answers and send the sheets back to Christine. She corrects them and gives them to the kids to keep in a folder. We are hoping to have a confirmation service at the end of spring 2021.

The Sunday evening services, and the online prayer meeting took a break over Christmas. Both restart on / after 10 January.

Before the second lockdown we had a careful church coffee in the church yard. We are so glad we did this on 29 November as a kind of Advent treat, because a week later anything like that wasn't possible anymore.

We had reserved a Sunday in December as a **Nativity Sunday** of some kind. Since in November it seemed wise to do as many events as possible outdoors, Christine had the idea of nativity stations in the park next to the church. When it came nearer to the date, we realized that by then we had the ban on going out. As people were only allowed to be out of their home for serious reasons, a fun thing in the park did not seem appropriate anymore. We took what we had planned indoors, had no singing but only music, and enjoyed a very makeshift nativity play. By the end of the four nativity stations each child had a little Nativity Story-Telling Sack filled with an angel, a baby Jesus, a piece of cloth, a bit of wool, and a star. All were in a little silk bag with a story sheet. The idea was that the kids would take the little sack home, unpack it any time and retell the story of the Christ birth as often as they wanted to.



For **Christmas Eve** we had planned to be outside the church in the yard. We had hoped that there we could sing our favourite songs. But by then singing was forbidden everywhere. So, Katie played the great Christmas hymns and the utmost we did was hum along. It rained and stormed, it was hard to read the texts in the bulletins. The sermon manuscript was soaked when Christine spoke the Amen. We had a wonderful “Cloth for the Cradle” ceremony, a tiny sermon, candle lights and Glühwein to go – what a Christmas.



All the church kids under 14 years old received Christmas presents from the church. Pastor Christine, Sue Lawson and Katie Gill organised the presents. Thanks to Katie and Cathy. We so hope the kids loved their parcels. On top of that, every church household received a Christmas card, lovingly written by Cathy. We try to

stay in touch with all church members and friends, even though many find it hard if not impossible to come to church at present.





On **New Year's Eve** we worshipped in the yard again. We stood round a fire bowl, reflected on the past year, lit candles, prayed for ourselves, our church and the world and heard encouraging thoughts coming from the prophet Jeremiah. "Believe me", Jeremiah might say today, "God needs you in this church and in this city. God needs you in this country. God needs you for his world. You can make a difference, if you just do what Jesus has taught you to. Follow him, care and heal and help and save. You can do it – especially in the year to come." Katie played the songs which we otherwise would have sung. Reiner accompanied her with the recorder. The music touched our hearts – especially when it came to "Should auld acquaintance be forgot..." With warm hearts and cold hands and noses, we had Glühwein again to keep us warm. Magic moments!





We tried a first careful **communion service** after ten months without. We had a well known and long missed liturgy – “Jesus was always the guest...”, listened to communion hymns played by Reiner with his various recorders. After 30 minutes everyone received an individually packed little communion bag with a piece of delicious bread and some grapes. Everyone kept the bags in their hands until we had spoken the blessing and entered the church yard. There we stood in a big circle, observed the distances of 1.50 metres between families, households and individuals and ate the bread and “drank the wine”. We noticed how painfully we had missed sharing bread and wine, and we will surely try this kind of communion again. It is definitely better than nothing.

Pastor Christine will have to give up her nice office in church. A new deacon is coming to work at the Philippskirche and will need the office space. Christine will continue to spend time in church so people can meet her there, but from now on you will need to book an appointment with her before you go and see her. Apart from that she will work more from home, and also offers to visit you in your homes. Feel free to get in touch with her.

The Peace Church family certainly had to come up with new and flexible ideas in the past year. Many of us think we did quite well. We discovered some new awesome things which we can do as a church. And we are curious what the new year holds in store for us: both – challenges and blessings. No matter what, God will be at our side and walk the path with us.



Making of the videos...





Invitation to Peace Church in 2021

We are offering the following worship opportunities:

All-age Worship at 12 noon on Sundays

Quiet Evening Prayer on Sundays at 6 pm

Online Prayer Time on Tuesday at 6 pm

Impressum

Your suggestions, comments and contributions are welcome. Deadline for the next issue is 15 February. If you would like to receive future issues by e-mail, please send a message to christine@peacechurch.de, simply type "PCN by mail" and we will add your address to the list.

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