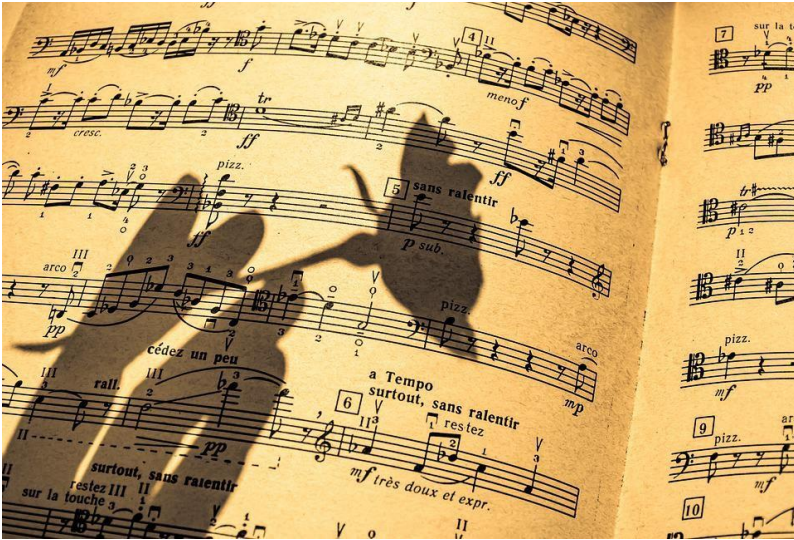


## The Melody of Faith

### Sermon for the 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity

Sermon Text: Isaiah 12:1-6

*You will say in that day: "I will give thanks to You, O Lord, for though You were angry with me, Your anger turned away, that You might comfort me. <sup>2</sup> "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation." <sup>3</sup> With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. <sup>4</sup> And you will say in that day: "Give thanks to the Lord, call upon His name, make known His deeds among the peoples, proclaim that His name is exalted. <sup>5</sup> "Sing praises to the Lord, for He has done gloriously; let this be made known in all the earth. <sup>6</sup> Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."*



A small group is gathered on top of a little hill. They were gathered in a circle – some quickly gave hugs before the ceremony continued. Some stare stunned into nothingness, while others weep without restraint. From their posture, you can immediately recognize them as mourners. They have lost a loved one. The death was unexpected and occurred much too soon. All the words spoken here at this grave can't counteract this great sorrow. And then someone starts singing a song. The song talks of faith and trusting God. A few sing along loudly and clearly. They pull the others along. Most whisper the song and yet it comforts and

seems to work against the grief a little. At least the song is a first attempt to come to terms with death and above all, helps to look into the future. The song makes them turn their thoughts to God. Some ask why God allowed death to happen, what meaning it might have. For this little group, it is as if they were all at once in another space and in another time. It is God's time, God's space. And it is God's plan which goes far above human understanding. Completely unremarkably, the group senses that there is another reality than this heap of earth and this terrible death. One can even dare to say: "I thank You, Lord, for this time and for this life!" Interestingly enough, many Biblical songs of praise and thanksgiving were written in such times, where sorrow was overwhelming and hopelessness spread. Songs of praise and thanksgiving, not because everything is okay but the opposite – often it was precisely these times of great sorrow when such songs of thanksgiving were heard and only gained their true meaning in such times. This space that we tread when we thank God in times of need is a holy space. For example, you stand at the bedside of a dying person and don't know what to say... a psalm is read or a song is sung... then something happens... you notice how an inner strength flows from the sick person. He has miraculously received new strength of faith from somewhere and radiates deep joy, even though his body is already in the advanced process of dying. You can see how the sick person experiences comfort from the rod and staff of the Good Shepherd and knows they are safe and protected in His arms. God can gift such a trust in Him. Little by little and in the mists of time, we can always feel it. Maybe we are all like this group that grieves their dead loved one – some cry, some stay silent... but we can let ourselves be moved at the same time. Sometimes, one voice can carry the whole gathering. Sometimes there is no strength to sing and they can only listen to the words that others sing. Someone else has to give us faith. Sometimes, I can proclaim this faith to others. And in the end, it's like the little group by the graveside – first singing tentatively, and then stronger until we all sing together, even when we are sad.

In our sermon text, we are taught this melody of faith in sorrow. We read a very old text from the book of Isaiah. The song is from a time when the Jewish people were in captivity. For the people of Israel, this was not fate or a streak of bad luck that they were in captivity; they already knew exactly how this had happened. It was because God's righteous wrath was directed against the people. They forgot their covenant with God and made covenants with earthly

rulers. They trusted more in their own ability and not in God. They also had devastating wickedness in their midst. That's why the people fell into misfortune and Israel had to be led into captivity again and again. They became homeless and were forced into servitude in Babylon. Israel's history appears familiar to us – we also have had experiences with human and worldly helpers and rescuers. At first, we blindly trust these helpers and believe that they have a solution for everything. If I have a headache, I take a pill, if it gets worse, then the doctor or the hospital comes into play; for unemployment, there are social services; for the climate catastrophe, there is the World Climate Conference; politicians are responsible for peace; there are banks and stocks for the retirement pension; for the asylum follow-up application, there is always one or another well-known lawyer who, for a lot of money, is always successful... and if I still want to know something, there is always Google. We simply have a solution for everything... All these things are good, and I don't want to belittle them, but don't we place too much confidence in our own ways and resources? And therefore, we can no longer believe and above all, not know the melody of faith in times of crisis? Also out of place are the church services and prayers we say to God. Why should I pray when I already know the answer to all problems? And yet, time and again and ever more clearly, we are at the end of our rope with our solutions. Our worldly saviors are inherently limited. And not only that, but they can also fool us again and again. They do this when we confide in them too much. "Whatever your heart clings to and confides in, that is really your God" Martin Luther tells us. It sounds so simple and so obvious: put God in first place, trust only in Him. It is so striking how Martin Luther has us sing: *"And take they our life, Goods, fame, child, and wife, Though these all be gone, Our vict'ry has been won; The Kingdom ours remaineth."* (Lutheran Service Book 656:4) Sometimes we only understand this when we stand before closed doors here on earth. Then all at once, our eyes open and we can understand how precious our faith truly is. And that's exactly how it went for the people of Israel. They were led away into pagan Babylon. The Temple was destroyed. The kings of Israel were gone. Only ashes were left behind. Many an Israelite thought in that day that God would now also cease to exist. Some even completely turned away from God and worshipped false gods. But then, a miracle happened. God opened the eyes of the people. They could see that God was still with them even without a temple and even in their captivity. Until that point, this was completely crazy because most of the Israelites thought that God was bound to the Temple in Jerusalem! This realization that God was with them even in a foreign land resulted in the confession that God is everywhere and holds His hand over us. Even death can't keep us from Him and His love for us. And even God's anger is a sign of His love for us, hence this amazing song of Isaiah. God, thank You for Your anger! Israel walks on holy ground even in Babylon!

Trusting God when all doors are closed and when all human helpers are at their wits' end is certainly not easy. Yet in this, God's power is clearer to see. I'll give an example of this: Micha is in the prime of his life. He wanted to build a future in Germany. He didn't want anything extraordinary, just to lead a normal life and the right to earn his own living. Things turned out differently after he spent a lot of money on a lawyer for the follow-up application. The doors here in Germany remained closed at first. And then Micha said this amazing sentence: "I have fought for life in this world and won life in the next world. I have no earthly passport but through Baptism, I have received a passport in heaven." Like Micha, many have said it before. When I hear something like this, it fills me again and again with deep joy and spiritual comfort. I notice that we walk on holy ground here. It is not the floor of the Temple in Jerusalem. No, it is the ground of faith. This ground is frequently watered with tears. But perhaps that's exactly why it is such fertile ground. Miracle of miracles, something grows there, something that transcends space and time, something that is much more important than a passport or a roof over your head. Once this holy ground was in the forced labor of the Israelites, once on a hill at a funeral, once in the home for asylum seekers in Saxony. Today we again stand on holy ground. This is holy ground. Jesus says to us here: "This is my body, this is my blood – given for you, shed for you." There is nothing to see there but a little communion wafer and a small sip of wine... but there is the power of faith... this is our holy temple... the world and devil and all the powers in heaven and on earth cannot prevail against the power of God. Amen.