

There is a Second Chance!
Sermon for the 3rd Sunday after Trinity
Sermon Text: Ezekiel 18:1-4, 21-24, 30-32



The Word of the Lord came to me: ² “What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? ³ As I live, declares the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. ⁴ Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die... ²¹ “But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. ²² None of the transgressions that he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness that he has done he shall live. ²³ Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? ²⁴ But when a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice and does the same abominations that the wicked person does, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds that he has done shall be remembered for the treachery of which he is guilty and the sin he has committed, for them he shall die... ³⁰ “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. ³¹ Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? ³² For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live.

Amir now calls a little town in Saxony home. But this place is never really home for him. Even if the idyllic town is beautiful with its green meadows, horses, and sheep, this town can never replace what is stuck in Amir's mind. What is fixed in his mind as home is a suburb of the great city of Tehran in Iran. Amir's thoughts always circle back to this place because that is his story. This is where Amir grew up and where he lived until he was 26 years old. In his memories, Amir can recall everything that happened there: the smell of the pita bakers; his inner eye can remember the laughing children in the street; his ears can hear the nagging of Fatima as she berates her husband for not being the entrepreneur she had married and turning into a lazy person. All those are memories that Amir carries with him vividly and realistically in his head. Even the traumatic experiences are always with him. At first, his father had also enthusiastically joined in the excitement when the Ayatollah came and ushered in a new just government. But what came was a war that lasted over 8 years and a dictatorship that made the Shah look like a kindergarten. Amir himself became a great objector of the Mullah regime. Then they protested. The town where children laughed and Fatima nagged, transformed into a bloodbath. Police brutality and screaming people, bullets and smoke now characterized everyday life. Then the Sepah (Iranian special forces) came. Many were arrested, Amir was too. In Saxony during the long lonely nights, the prison and torture remained in his head. He could never separate all of that from the present moment. Everything remained with him, for always.

Once, Amir observed a beetle in the stream near his home in Saxony. The beetle had saved itself from the flood by climbing on a leaf and was now drifting into the unknown by the stream. Under the beetle was the deep, dangerous water, above him was the sky that stretched into infinity, before him was the unknown path of the water. "What a beetle you are!" Amir then thought. "Your old story is like the deep waters under you. So much has happened in your story and in your family's story! You have only the faintest glimpse and a few voices in your head that speak of a much more profound story. And now you are being carried through the floods of time on your little leaf lifeboat. You have absolutely no influence over where the path leads and where the end of your story is!"

What Amir thought at the stream in the little Saxon town was what the Israelites also thought during the Babylonian Captivity. As slaves in Babylon, the Israelites had a proverb that describes exactly this. At that time, the people thought that sour grapes would give you dull teeth. But now the proverb says that the parents have eaten sour grapes and the children got dull teeth because of this. This means that the children must inherit what their parents did wrong. That was the way it was then and it seems to me that nothing has changed. Whether we're following current political events or environmental politics or saving the world from a third world war. We constantly hear this accusation: the guilt of the parents will affect the children. We know that the past is a stressful weight on our lives. Next to the many good experiences, there is guilt and suffering. That's how it is in our interpersonal gatherings, in our marriages and families and wherever people meet. How we would like to just start over. But it doesn't work like that. Our story constantly affects us and follows us into the present too. For the Israelites in Babylon, the sentence that the children should pay for the sins of their parents still had a cynical, hopeless undertone because the Israelites also raised an accusing finger to God. God wants to give consequences to the children for their parents' sins. And if that is so, the individual can really change nothing about his fate. He must simply surrender his future like the beetle in the stream and let himself drift. Neither belief nor disbelief; neither turning away from God nor

returning to Him; neither good deed nor bad deeds would have any influence or meaning because, as the Israelites said, God will punish either way.

Through Ezekiel, God speaks against just such an assumption and against cynicism like this! And the Word of the Lord came to Ezekiel: As I live, declares the Lord God, "such words shall no longer apply! No, you are not at the mercy of your fate!" God calls out through Ezekiel. The Israelites' proverb is dangerous because each individual can talk themselves out of personal responsibility! If God mercilessly visits the sins of the fathers on the children, I don't want to change anything anymore because it is pointless anyway! "No," God says. "I want to make today count for you!" Although each person carries many old stories of entanglements, burdens, and guilt, God is saying something completely new here. I don't want to accept the old ways anymore. You, as you are right now, with all your failures and hopelessness, should have another chance to start completely from fresh. The only thing that matters is that you can turn back to the living God. It's a great blessing to receive a second chance!

Amir also knew that as he sat by the stream in Saxony. At first, the helplessness of the beetle touched his heart. It was so simple for him. With a move of the hand, he fished the beetle with his boat out of the water and onto land. The beetle quickly found solid ground beneath his feet and could stretch out his wings in the sun to let them dry. Then he just flew away! "We need a hand from above. We need God's hand that saves us from everything!" Amir thought. Amir actually experienced something like this too. One day, God simply fished him out of the current of time and placed him on solid ground. He could receive a second chance. The second chance that Amir received was that he read the Bible and got to know Christ. After that, he could give everything to God in his prayers. He was also baptized and with that, he could just leave his entire history in God's hand. Now Amir could go down a completely new path. This path is far beyond time and history. Ezekiel tells us why that is. God doesn't want the death of sinners. God sees how we are driven away in our sin. And He has heartfelt mercy on us. It is His heart's desire to save us. Unlike Amir who casually fishes a beetle out of the water, God gives up everything so that we don't die. Through Jesus Christ, He took upon death so that we could live. Through Jesus, God also took away our sins. If we are in Jesus and have been baptized, we are taken out of all bad things. Because God established it like that, I now know that I may stand on solid ground. Naturally, I still have my history. Naturally, I still have my guilt and hurts that weigh me down in life. But I may constantly turn back to the living God who carries me and saves me from the depths. He gives me a second chance! Amen.