

THE FUTURE



Sermon on Sunday Sexagesimä Isaiah 55, 6-13

6 Seek the Lord while he is found; call him while he's near. 7 Let the wicked turn from his way, and the evildoer from his thoughts, and turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and on our God, for with him is much forgiveness. 8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord, 9 but as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. 10 For as the rain and snow come down from heaven and never return there, but moisten the earth and make it fruitful and sprout, giving seed to sow and bread to eat, 11 so shall the word that goes out of my mouth, also be: It will not come back to me empty again, but will do what pleases me, and it will succeed in what I send it to. 12 For you shall go out in joy and be led in peace. Mountains and hills shall rejoice before you with shouts, and every tree of the field shall clap their hands.

In Germany there are more than 40 groups that have made the future of the world their main topic. The question of the future worries people and causes great concern. "Give us back our future!" scream the children of Fridays for Future. Today we want to talk about the future! The only problem with the future is this: we cannot say what will happen. At least not exactly. How often have we heard this sentence in the past year: "No one saw that coming." And it is precisely this thought that is frightening for many. Again and again we notice that we are overwhelmed by events that we cannot control. Or we embark on a path that later turns out to be serious mistakes for us and for our children. So we realize that our knowledge is limited. Not only is our knowledge limited, but our abilities are also limited... Does anyone have a plan? Is there anyone who can show us the way to the future? When Isaiah the prophet thinks of the future, he can only think of one. This is God. God made the world. And because he made the world in the past, he also has a plan for the future. So he calls it out to his countrymen:

“6 *Seek the Lord while he is found; call on him while he is near.*” Israel, then living in Babylon, knew this God. And yet they have adapted this god. HE should adapt to their political and worldly ideas. He should be like them and think like them. They wanted God, but not the God who made them, but a God they made themselves. God, the Creator of all things, had to yield so that they could place an adjusted God at the center. God had to disagree:

“⁸ *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord,* ⁹ *but as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.* ”

God's ways and plans are sky-high above anything we imagine of him. To be honest, we too have to ask ourselves whether some pious sentences really speak about God or only about our own pious ideas. For example, the following sentence is found in a devotional book: “***I find trust in God, in myself and in other people. Trust also in life and its indestructible, unswerving power.***” The first time you read the sentence sounds so correct: I find trust in God.... But afterwards it almost seems as if the author has to be ashamed of his own belief in God and has to explain the need to add to what it all means. And I ask myself whom I should actually believe in: in indestructible nature? To the neighbor? To myself?... Or to God alone? And didn't this sentence grow out of the embarrassment that in reality one cannot believe in God alone, but only in a God who is disguised in all sorts of other pious words and concepts that we wish for ourselves? God lets Isaiah call: God has a plan! But his plan cannot be manipulated by us or even understood. We cannot make God comprehensible with our thinking. The great danger is that we try to do just that. And so we leave aside the one who alone holds the plan for our future. God does not want us to sink into hopelessness. So he reminds us to let him stand. To leave him alone in our worries about the future. Without God, like them, we stand in a store to buy something... only we have the wrong currency and get nowhere. That is why Isaiah writes in the verses just before the ones read today: ... ***2Why do you count money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen to me, and you will eat well and feast on what is delicious. Listen carefully and come to me! Listen, this is how you will live!***

Could this request also apply to us? Could it be that we are striving and even struggling about many things, but in doing so have left God out of the play and thus left out the most important actor? And would we really be happier if someone could prove to us today without a doubt that worldly problems could be eliminated with the stroke of a pen? Jesus also calls out to us: “*What profit would it make to a man if he gained the whole world and yet his soul suffered damage?*” God does not want to leave us without a future. Nor does he want us to despair of our limitations. And that's why he wants us to leave him alone in front of us and our future. The text from Isaiah 55 speaks of such a hopeful future in God. And in such a way that all of creation is involved in this hopeful future. Even the mountains, the trees and the fields will rejoice and rejoice. And we humans line up with creation and rejoice in the salvation that God is preparing for us. The text of Isaiah is thus a truly ecological text that sees our salvation from sin, death and the devil in close connection with the salvation of all nature. God does not want us to live without hope for the future. God does not want us to put all our hope in nature instead of in nature's Creator. God wants us to trust in him alone, who is above all our thinking and ability.

In referring to God's superiority one could understand that we shirk any responsibility. So we could use God's omniscience as an excuse to talk our way out of some guilt or not have to worry about the future of future generations at all. But that is not the meaning here. Of course

we should worry about the future. Of course we should do everything so that we and our children can live better here on earth. Isaiah also understood God's work in such a way that he addressed very specific problems in his world. The key is God's Word itself. We cannot see into the future. But we can see God's Word. God's word that speaks about time and the world into our world and into our history. Word of God made flesh in Christ. God does not remain hidden, but speaks to us. He lives in us through the Holy Spirit, and he also talks to us about specific questions and problems that we have today. In today's text, God paints a picture of how all this happens. For this he uses the image of rain. When rain falls on the earth, something happens. It's a law of nature. When rain falls, new life sprouts even in the arid desert. And so it is with God's Word. God's word does not come back empty. It's like the rain. Wherever God's Word is spoken and heard, God works in our world. When God speaks, it happens! God's creative power does not end with the creation of the world. He still creates today. And he does that by his word. When God speaks to me today, his word penetrates my life story and makes new history. A story that begins here and now and remains unbroken far into the distant future. Amen.