

Harmonious Sounds in the Christian Life  
Sermon for 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Easter (Jubilate)  
Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 4:14-18



*Knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into His presence. <sup>15</sup> For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. <sup>16</sup> So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

One day I was watching a choir rehearsing one of Bach's cantatas. It seemed to me that the choir was still far from performing this piece, because even to my non-musical ear, I could recognize the off-key notes and discord between the individual parts of the choir. The conductor let the choir improvise for a while to see if they could harmonize after all. But nothing helped. In the end, they had to stop the rehearsal and start all over again. In a short speech afterwards, the conductor reminded the choir of a few basic principles, which went something like this:

- 1: You only focus on your own notes... pay attention to the bigger picture
- 2: You didn't pay attention to the accidentals and turned the major key into a minor key
- 3: You must stay with the beat!

Similar to the choir practice, the Christians' journey after the resurrection of our Lord Jesus can be understood. The Christians had experienced the wonderful resurrection of their Lord, but then everyday life returned. The hardships and afflictions of daily life replaced the hope in Christ. The Corinthians also experienced fundamental dissonance because they could not reconcile life in this world with the hope of the world to come. Some believed that Christians should be spiritual beings now and break off contact with the physical world. This view, for example, led some to be outraged that the apostle Paul did not appear with more spiritual power and authority. Others, on the other hand, believed that one should be completely satisfied with the realities of this world, as there was no resurrection and no final victory over death. In this situation, the church in Corinth fell completely out of rhythm, and the music coming from the church was a hideous disharmony. Nothing helped now. Paul had to stop the whole mess and start again. Like the conductor at choir practice, Paul reminded the congregation of the basic principles of the Christians life:

- 1: The congregation should not only pay attention to its own notes, but to the overall picture.
- 2: The congregation should pay attention to the sign, namely the resurrection of Christ.
- 3: The congregation should stay in line with the rhythm set for us by this Lord from eternity.

First of all, just as a musician can become completely engrossed in a difficult piece of music without paying attention to the bigger picture, the same can happen to us Christians. It is in our human nature to place more value on the things that happen immediately around us than on the bigger picture. For example, when I am in an argument, all my feelings, emotions and strength are focused on this one point. And when I am ill, my whole life is affected and weighed down by the present pain. But it is precisely this focus on the negative aspects of the moment that throws us off balance. Similar to the choral piece, Christ calls us to look beyond the notes. You must not just focus on your own notes that you are playing at that moment, but on the bigger picture. It is true that the notes we are playing are marked

by sickness, death and human weakness. But remember that the bright glow that Christ brings to your heart has to do with the whole picture and is connected to the first word of creation from our God who brought light out of darkness. In this same chapter, Paul speaks of us being earthen vessels and therefore having all the characteristics of earthen vessels. But that is only one aspect. The music I am playing right now is only one part. There is much more than what I am doing right now. Our Sunday today is called "Jubilate" - that means rejoice! Rejoice! When we say it like this, it doesn't mean that we only rejoice when the sun is shining. No, the rejoicing we have is looking at the bigger picture. We rejoice in the resurrection precisely because we have gone through the depths of the cross and suffered under it. We also rejoice because we can see the deep places in our lives under the cross and in Christ. We can place joy and suffering under the cross and in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus and recognize in it the Creator God who wanted us from the beginning and therefore gives us the hope of a new creature.

However, we can only do all this because we have the sign "IN CHRIST" in our lives. In this Sunday's Gospel, we heard that we are planted in Christ and can grow from Him. We are like branches that are closely connected to the vine. Only through this connection with the vine does our life have a different and new value. This Jesus is the "accidental" of all our notes. Through our baptism, this sign has come into our lives. Through this sign, everything else that we experience has a completely different value. And we can certainly experience ups and downs. Both are under the sign of "in Christ". In the knowledge that we are implanted in Christ, Paul can look at human weakness with great calmness. He says that the old creature is passing away. We are also surrounded by human weakness. But that is not the determining factor. What shapes us and characterizes us is Christ! In Christ we can even boast about our weakness, because we know that in Christ we have a completely different sign. And this sign is new life and a new creature!

Lastly, it is important that we keep the rhythm in our Christian life, just like in a harmonious symphony. In this passage, Paul puts things next to each other that don't actually belong together, and which can therefore throw us off beat. On the one hand, he speaks of earthen vessels that perish, and on the other of the new creature, about affliction and weariness, as well as about the glory of the children of God. Both belong together in the Christian life. However, it is important that we keep the beat. It is true that we Christians can also become weary or lose hope. The negative things in life have the ability to determine our whole life. Sometimes we also think we are losing faith or can no longer believe. These are all facts of our lives. But we must not allow these things to set the pace. The beat is set by Jesus. And this beat comes from the new reality that emerges from Him. The new reality that is in Jesus is authoritative, and we are guided by it. This means that the things in Christ have the upper hand! When a choir is practicing, each member must pay close attention to the conductor so that they don't lose the beat. And in the same way, we look with great concentration and expectation at every word of God and allow ourselves to be guided by it. That sets the beat. What this can mean was said by a prisoner in concrete terms. She was tortured for many months and yet remained steadfast. After a while, a prison guard came to her and wanted to know: "Can you tell me where you get the strength to endure all this?" This prisoner was then able to tell the prison guard about Christ. It can be like that. Weak in body and devastated, but victorious in Christ and full of resurrection hope. Amen. *(The idea for the piece of music comes from Reginna Stierlein from: "Zuversicht und Stärke", 6th series, booklet 3, p. 31ff.)*