



## **SUNDAY MORNING SERMON**

*Andreas Laqueur*

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

“Why do we find the psalms in the Bible?” I have to admit. This question did surprise me, when one participant asked me last Sunday. Honestly I never thought about it.

I cannot offer an explanation – or to revert to the statement of two lecturers of the previous afternoons: this is not my field of competence. Who am I to know how and why this book of poetry and prayers found its way into the “canon”? I do not even dare with the most competent guidance to restore even half a verse of a psalm in its premasoretic structure. Should I in a manner of speaking have a critical look over the shoulder of the Holy Spirit and watch him as he long ago guided wise men to include the psalms in the Bible?

However – I am deeply grateful to them that they did include them. I am deeply grateful to find a treasure of prayers – a mirror of the most different situations in life: joy and gratitude, trust and confidence, fear and distress, anger and desperation.

Last week we studied the first half of the second book of psalms. I personally experienced that it is not every psalm that speaks to me at a given time and in a specific situation – but I am sure that I am not alone with this experience.

Although I gained most thrilling insights into the structure and the composition of Psalm 45, although I had at least a glimpse on the wealth of Jewish tradition studying a few interpretations of Rashi and the Radak – the imagery of the kingly wedding, the princesses wearing embroidered garments and virgin companions remained distant, a view on a world of fairy tales far, far away rather than a view on my personal life.

We continued our studies with Psalm 49 since we decided to omit the two Psalms in between. And all of a sudden I had a thrilling experience: This Psalm sounded quite modern in my ears, the experience of the author, the image of people who have faith in their fortune, who boast of their wealth, who build their houses for eternity, who wish to immortalize their names and want to buy immortality. “I know somebody like that”, said one participant of our group.

And something else struck me immediately: The obvious parallel between the core message of the Psalm and the Gospel of the rich fool according to St. Luke, the reading we just heard. These were two good reasons for me to choose this psalm for our further reflection in this service.

The centre, the climax of the Psalm can be found exactly in its middle. The German translation is taken from the "Münsterschwazacher Psalter", the English one is taken from the Koren edition:

When he sees that wise men die, that the fool and the brutish person perish together, and leave their wealth to others: their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless man abides not in honour: he is like the beasts that perish.

The Gospel shows us Jesus as what he is: A Jewish rabbi deeply rooted in his Jewish belief and affected by the spirituality of the psalms. Someone in the crowd turns to Jesus and says to him:

"Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." But He said to him, "Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?" And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." Then He spoke a parable to them.

This parable occurs to me as a direct interpretation of Psalm 49.

The parable is called in German "The Parable of the Rich Farmer". The New Kings James version gives it a more pointed title: "The Parable of the Rich Fool". It culminates in the punch line:

"So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

The understanding that I eventually have to die enables me to lead a life before death. It is not the possessions assets and appearance that count but my life towards God and towards my fellow human being. And it is my life in its finiteness.

I shall be rich before God through a life in reverence for God and love for my fellow human being. I shall be rich before God by asking and exploring who to conduct my life before death towards God and my fellow human being. A week as the one we spent together makes me rich before God, studying the Tanakh together with Jews and Christians. No matter if we are fluent in Hebrew or illiterate, if we count strophes and cola, if we paste our paper midrash with pieces of coloured paper, if we paint our thoughts and feelings on silk – it is always the same goal we are trying to achieve: We want make the text ring, we want to really understand its significance for our lives as individuals and as a community. We want to grasp how the text makes us rich.

Being rich before God we can hope, as emphasized by the Christian interpreters of Psalm 49, that ... *God will redeem our souls from the power of She'ol:* and that ... *he shall receive us.*

Amen

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

*translation: Andreas Laqueur*