

SERMON

Sermon for Mid-Lent Sunday

Gustaf Wingren

Luke 14:43–50 · 1980

16 March 1980

Danderyd Church (HHN)

Text: Luke 14:43–50

Hymns: 79:1–2; 202:1–3; 206:4; 80:6, 10; 94; 76:8

We often put the question how it is to go with God's cause in our world, how the future of faith is to take shape. Our text tells of the fate of faith in the world. The threat comes from without, from enemies with power, "swords and staves." Still greater is the danger from within. Jesus had chosen out twelve apostles. One of these "pillars of the church" gave him a kiss in the night, a liturgical behavior with a deep meaning. The other eleven were not passive either. They fled away from the danger.

Not a word is said in the text about how it felt when this happened. The account gives an outward course of events, as if a camera had taken the picture. Only the course. No comment.

This course is the beginning of the victory of faith. Out of this Golgotha and Easter are born, a fountain which still today waters the whole world. So also the old Israel received health, bread, and life out of the evil act which the sons of Jacob, they also eleven in number, committed when they cast their brother Joseph into a well, to die. God works far down in the depths. His fairest jewels he lifts up out of graves, out of wells without water, to all appearance without water. But when the spring breaks forth, then life streams out of the grave.

This message is, with all its darkness — for the text is night-black — a ground for our courage to live. We need continually, in all difficulties, to return to such depths. This holds for all. Not only convinced Christians. Of course it is above all important for us. But all can fetch strength out of the darkness of Israel, which became light, and out of the betrayal of Jesus, which became victory.

Yes, all who carry on a struggle need courage to live in the struggle, and all are tempted, in our time more than formerly, plainly, to fetch their courage out of success, out of visible successes. Which means: outward setbacks break the courage to live, immediately. Over one night the hope is lost. Older generations could struggle in a headwind their whole life and still believe in their cause. Is there any worse setback for one who sows and plants than the winter, the withering, the fall of the leaves, the cold, the snow, the frozen ground, the ice? And it is then that the explosion of life is prepared, down in the dark, down in the mold. This one knew formerly in the world. One saw it every year before one's eyes, in the everyday. We with our technical civilization have lost contact with reality. We think that the effect, the result, is to come on the minute, preferably on the second, as soon as we have pressed the button — otherwise there is something wrong with the whole apparatus of life. But there is nothing wrong. The wrong is in us. We do not see, and we do not believe.

Now it can seem as if we were carrying on a rather outward, material reasoning, grounded on agriculture and on the changing of the seasons, sowing and harvest. And it is true. The reasoning is almost painfully earthly and everyday. But it is through this nearness to the earth that we come near Jesus, the real Jesus, such as he is, before we made him over into a person with airy thoughts high up above the clouds. When he is to interpret his own life, he takes hold of just sowing and harvest, time after time. “If the grain of wheat does not die, nothing happens. It must down into the mold for something to happen.” And this “down into the mold” looks harsh when it happens — but it is life in the depth, as it is life in this betrayal-text of the event in the night, the kiss as a signal for the betrayal — and the flight, the flight of the apostles. Thereby the right grain of wheat was now isolated and alone, ready to fall. Out of that — and only out of that — was harvest to come, in the whole world.

And it has done so. It is still going on. Jesus Christ is living and gives himself to us, “in all our strife, in all our need.” He gives himself as bread to live on and wine to rejoice in. It happens today, here in Danderyd Church, and there is reason to think of this precisely on Mid-Lent Sunday, this day, when the heading over all the texts is two words: the bread of life.

When the Christian congregation was young and still felt the warmth from the body of Christ — he had just gone about here on earth — then one could in a simple and natural way hold together all this that we have spoken of with one another here.

Let us listen to them, these who were tried under hard conditions and who still kept the faith and had strength to look forward. “As the vine,” so it was said then, “rooted in the earth bears

fruit in its time, and as the grain of wheat, cast into the earth and dissolved, rises — and all becomes bread and drink for us, so we also live prepared for ruin and just so prepared for life.” In baptism we are baptized to be buried with him whom death has no power to hold in the dark, buried with him who lives forever. And in the Supper he comes to us, continually anew, not far from our need and our defeats. No, in the middle of this he comes to us. Therefore, every time the bread is broken, every time, in all peoples, in all languages, through the course of the millennia, this event is named, of which our text today speaks brutally: “In the night in which he was betrayed, he took the bread, broke it, gave...” We who receive, eat and drink, with our gaze directed forward, we are inside the process of growing. With our injuries we come, with the problems, with the anxiety not yet wholly healed, forward to the altar, forward to him who has passed the worst and who now gives himself, in bread and wine, gives himself and thereby future.

This is not something for Christian people only. Every struggling person who has a conviction about something — and all have that, otherwise one cannot live — every person needs courage to live, and he needs it especially when what is precious for him is crushed. And the humanly precious is crushed daily, round about us, in person after person. That life which shoots up out of death gives a little drop of courage to live: a tree that comes out, a slope, a water that runs, a child who plays, in the middle of the devilry only plays.

Such a spring of courage to live for the world is the congregation that celebrates the Supper. Even when one does not oneself think of going forward, one can stay and watch others’ celebration of the Supper, this meal which in visible form, in a picture for the eye, shows what the gospel is.

“There he sits. I know how he has it. But now he rises and goes forward. He has not let go. He still looks forward. And there she is. Yes, that she has the strength. But now he kneels up there, unloads as it were the burden.” To take part in this way in others’ Supper without oneself going forward was formerly called the “setting forth” of the Supper. Even if I in my inward part am far off, and perhaps despair at a little, very earthly point of existence, a point which has nothing at all to do with “religion,” as I think, even if it is so, I can fetch power, “bread” to live on, out of the sight of all life that stretches out of the dark and waits for the morning.

One darkness remains for us all, the unavoidable. In everything else we are unequal. Death is the only point in existence where equality is totally carried through. Of that point Jesus Christ

says that it is morning. “I am the bright morning star. He who thirsts, let him come. Yes, he who will, let him take the water of life freely.”

Let us pray.

O God, we thank you for Jesus Christ and that he has gone through everything, the torment and the betrayal and the pain and the death. When we come to our uttermost point, then he is already there, before us, with his victory. Give us patience in all need, and give us faith. To you be glory forever. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Translator's notes. He gave this sermon no title. The text line is given as he wrote it, Luke 14:43–50. Luke 14 ends at verse 35. The sermon is the night of the betrayal and the words “in the night in which he was betrayed.” That is not corrected in his heading. The man and the woman at the rail stay he and she, as he set them. The struggling person stays he. “Ära” in the prayer is glory.

Gustaf Wingren · draft translation ·