

Pastor Manfred Brockmann
Pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Vladivostok, Russia
The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, July 1, 2007
1 Kings 19:15-21, Galatians 5:1, 13-25, Luke 9:51-62

Dear congregation of Immanuel Lutheran Church New York,

We have come here from very far away, but we are all Christians, we believe in God, we believe with Jesus Christ in God, we believe in Jesus Christ. We have the same Bible, and by our church-tradition the same understanding of the Bible,- we are Lutherans. All this unifies us. I was given the texts, prayers and lectures of your today's service, and they are also ours.

When reading and meditating about them, I found: There is a common strong groundfeeling and expression in all of them, which I might precise with this only word: the DIFFERENCE. The difference between GOD and MAN. That sounds so purely dogmatic, so only right and nothing saying, but behold: It has its great human lived reality, or realities, it's not mere dogmatic, it is life, concrete life.

This difference is concrete life in the old Testament's Lesson, it's the difference between idolatry and the worshipping of God" all the knees, that have not bowed to Baal"= the two directions 1. direction to the Gods made by ourselves or 2. direction to the God, who has made all and is beyond all...concrete life: to turn around in our own products or to be freed from our own products - that's the difference, - every spiritual person, seeking for more than we are producing, does not want to be the product of consuming of our products, he wants more, more...freedom ... looking to God instead to our products- well that's the decisive difference.

This difference is to be seen in Paul's letter to the Galatians : it's the difference between flesh and spirit, and these two different ways of life are very concretethey are modes of living and "doing" ... The fruits of living either according to the flesh or according to the spirit are so concrete depicted in Paul's letter, we should only read this loudly to us and we must confess: truly, that's the decisive difference still today and for ever in our world , (read the verses of to the Gal). Truly that's the decisive difference still today and for ever in our world, at least for our world in Russia, where the church is a visible different society as the state - the church makes already it difference from society by the fact that here people don't lie or steal - it sounds so simple, but it is so simple: The church is an isle of humanity amidst of an ocean of corruption,- that's the difference.

This difference is also expressed in the psalm of today: "Protect me o God, for I take refuge in you...those who run after other Gods, shall have their trouble multiplied..." Oh, how true! "But I have set the Lord always before me...for you will not abandon me to the grave... You will show me the path of Life, in your presence there is fullness of joy, and in you right hand are pleasures for evermore." Every spiritual one knows, that this is simply true, and that this make the difference between this world and God: in the end there is only in God "fullness of joy" and only in Him "pleasures for evermore"!

And how well you have expressed the difference between God and man in this world in your prayer of the day:" O God, you have prepared for those, who love you, joys beyond understanding. Pour into our hearts such love for you that, loving you above all things, we may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire."

But now, my dear beloved ones, there is not only a DIFFERENCE between God and man, there is even more a great DISTANCE between God and man , yet even we may say, a GAP. Of this distance and Gap between God and man, the Russian people, where I live, had always a deep feeling and understanding. That may have its reason in the history of the heavy, difficult life in Russia and suffering for centuries up to nowadays in this country. I want to present you for this a song, whose text is made by a great Russian poet, Dershavin, and which we have placed now into our hymn-book of the Lutheran Church in Russia. It is one of our most beloved hymns, for good reasons. I'll sing it to you in Russian. But the translation is this: "O God, our Lord, have a

merciful look on us, who are exhausted by the hard fight/- by your word mountains are moving and stones are only melting wax before you....” Etc “You created paradise and expelled us from there, God, lead us merciful back to you? We are tired of erring in darkness, yes, we have sinned, forgive us forgive.”

The is not only a DIFFERENCE between God and man, there is even a big DISTANCE and a GAP between GOD and MAN. And how to overcome this? Jesus Christ has overcome this gap. We know and believe this. Again at first only a dogmatic answer. But again an answer full of life and concrete reality. And how concrete it's going to overcome this big distance and gap between God and Man, we hear in the Gospel of today. A simple story from the Gospel, but so full of reality of life and even of today's life! Yes, my dear, it is often already enough to hear and to meditate these stories of the Gospel, they are full of the fullest reality, for a spiritual person they don't need any explanation or even worse “modernization”, they are convincing by themselves for ever! (Read the Gospel Luke 9:51-62)

No explanation, o.k. We all understand. But only two little final remarks.

1) The thing is serious, very serious. When Jesus is calling somebody to follow him, it is the great chance for him, to get a decisive turn-around from this world and its distractions to God and all abundance of life, as it is only to be found in Him. How did we hear it in our today's psalm? “In your presence there is fullness of joy, and in your right hand are pleasures for ever!”

What a striking and overwhelming revelation, yes revelation, for every spiritually hungry man, who is seeking more than this world and its advertising is offering! The first encounter with such an offer, made by Jesus, is also the decisive turn-around, so called “conversion”. So it was in the life of St Augustine, so it was also in my life, I confess in all modesty. Yes, I will go in this direction my life-long and more and more experience the “fullness of joy and the pleasures fore ever”

And 2) Such a call by Jesus, such an encounter with Him, as recorded in our Gospel is not only a thing of the passed time, it happens still today, it has happened all the history long of our church. And I want to encourage you to two things: a) live in attention and in sensibility to your own daily life. It can happen that Jesus Christ meets you in this way as here in our Gospel. Don't miss Him! -- And b) Do sometimes a remembering, reflection, meditation of your own passed life. May be, that you find a moment, even a story, where Jesus met you, and you only did not realize it then. But now, make it appear again this meeting and encounter with Him! To overcome the gap between God and you, of which you are suffering.

And a very last remark: the great Russian-Orthodox theologian, Alexander Menh, whom I esteem very much, wrote in his little book “Encounter with the Risen Christ”, that such an encounter with Christ is possible and granted to everybody “who has ears to hear”, and was also granted to many persons in church history, just as it was granted to Paul, who never saw Christ in his body, but had a personal encounter with Him, which made him the great apostle.

--You can meet and even “see” Jesus Christ in your earthy life, pay attention, live sensible to your life! And, so the conclusion of Alexander Menh, of such people, sensible to the appearance of Jesus Christ in their own life our whole Christian Church was and is living. Don't forget: Your personal life can be an essential part of Church History. By experiencing the truth: CHRIST HAS OVERCOME THE DISTANCE AND THE GAP BETWEEN GOD AND MAN you keep our church alive!

Amen