
Meditation
on "*You Are Looking for Jesus*"

::: ZERO :::

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

*“Grace to you and PEACE from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

1 Co 1:3. (NRSV)

::: Amen.

::: ONE :::

It is Easter Sunday.

Everything revolves around the resurrection of Jesus. Just as we heard in the Gospel for today.

We hear the words today which the women heard then: “Do not be alarmed; *you are looking for Jesus* of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here.”

But we also heard words from the Second Book of Moses, the Book of Exodus, the book of the liberation of the people of Israel from Egypt.

How does that go together?

Well, the idea probably is *liberation*.

But why the Easter event is a liberation is something that first needs to be examined.

In any case, I realise that life feels lighter again at Easter. Easter is the light side of the coin, the opposite side of which is revealed to us on Good Friday.

::: TWO :::

The stories of the Exodus of the people of Israel and the account of the empty tomb also have this in common:

They describe that someone is no longer where the others want him to be.

Let's start with the people.

In the book of Exodus, we read about the people who - as the story of this book tells us - are brought to Egypt as the tribe of the forefather Jacob by his son Joseph in order to escape a great famine.

The tribe grows into a nation in Egypt. And after a new Pharaoh becomes ruler in Egypt, who knows nothing more of the story, he begins to oppress the people. The Hebrews become "slaves in Egypt".

And their place is set. They are oppressed, labourers, slaves, unfree. And Pharaoh does everything he can to keep them in this place.

The Second Book of Moses describes how hopeless the situation is. Nothing seems to be able to change.

When Moses appears in the story—having grown up as a foundling in Pharaoh's court, having fled from punishment himself, things change. But not for the better—for the time being.

Pharaoh responds to the demand to let the people go into the desert so that they can sacrifice to their God with even harsher oppression.

Hopelessness.

Everything seems hopeless, because Pharaoh remains stubborn, the oppression gets worse, and Moses' mission seems completely pointless in the face of Pharaoh's superiority.

::: THREE :::

In the Gospel of Mark we read about the women, followers and disciples of Jesus.

What must that be like? To be travelling with someone on whose words and deeds you place all your hope.

And then this person, this beloved, honoured person, is taken prisoner, beaten, mocked.

And as if that wasn't enough, it gets even worse. It becomes hopeless. Jesus is condemned, tortured and executed. He hangs hopelessly on the cross.

There on the cross, he also loses all hope. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me", he cries out.

All the three women can do is honour his dead body, embalm it.

But even that is denied them, because Jesus' body is gone. There is nothing left of him. Complete despair. Absolute hopelessness.

::: FOUR :::

People live in their country, which is their home. But they are threatened—
because of their faith,
because of the colour of their skin,
because of the people they love.

There seems to be nothing that cannot bring out hatred in those who feel right.

People suffer in their country because the climate is becoming unbearable and the water is up to their necks, they cannot live—or they have long since run *out of* water.

Or they suffer because they are not allowed to learn, there is no income, no work— no livelihood.

Hopelessness.

And if that weren't bad enough, they discover just how deep that hopelessness can become when the inhumanity of those they seek refuge with hits them in the face.

Boats capsize, people drown, borders are closed, fear of loss reigns, hearts harden. Hopelessness grows.

But hopelessness doesn't require any global, contemporary, or political events. A single life sinking into hopelessness is enough.

Gone to rack and ruin.

But making a ruinously wrong decision.

Having the wrong feeling.

Meeting the wrong person.

Being too weak—maybe only once.

Betting on the wrong horse.

Trusting the wrong people.

Trusting the wrong things.

Saying the wrong thing
to the wrong people.

Inheriting the wrong genes.

And a whole life can sink into hopelessness and darkness.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not *comparing* anything. Because comparing the causes of hopelessness is about as useful as watching a cobblestone grow...

:: FIVE ::

The people in captivity.

The women in the empty tomb.

The needy in injustice.

The suffering in their own personal distress.

So hopeless.

But now a power enters the game which was not expected.

A power enters the game which leaves me equally stunned.

A God comes into play whose absolute will is to liberate his children, his creatures.

A God comes into play who leads his people to freedom.

He stands with those who are oppressed and live in bondage.

He stands against the oppressors, against those who want to keep others down.

He stands against people and against the forces that want to keep other people in their place of captivity—far from liberty.

Now, God's power, his strength, enters the game, which wants to—and is able to—give people a new place. A place in freedom.

∴ SIX ∴

There are reports of miracles from Egypt—for the Pharaoh in Egypt they were plagues.

But then he couldn't help himself and had to let the people go. Away out of slavery, onto the place of freedom.

It was a long road to freedom. But at the same time, it was the original experience of this people: our God is leading us to freedom.

Jesus stands in the history of God's people.

And with him, who during his lifetime was busy leading people to freedom— leading people out of illness, obsession, crippledness—a whole new story begins, a whole new dimension of freedom.

Miracles are reported from Jerusalem:

The three women in the empty tomb cannot even comprehend it yet—not to mention the man they then encountered.

“Do not be alarmed; *you are looking for Jesus* of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here.”

They cannot believe that Jesus is no longer in the place where they had laid him. In the tomb, the place of death.

God has led him to a new place, away from this place of death, to the place of life—to what the book of Isaiah so beautifully calls the *land of the living*, where death no longer has any power at all.

::: SEVEN :::

This is how God creates freedom:

Out of the land of slavery—into the land of promise...

Out of the grave—into the land of the living...

This is how God creates freedom:

Out of life-threatening poverty—
into a land of safety...

Out of the darkness of the soul—
into days of confidence...

This is how God creates freedom:

Out of a distorted relationship—
into an upright life...

Out of inhuman hatred—
into cautious acquaintance

Miracles are reported from Egypt...

Miracles are reported from Jerusalem...

Miracles are reported from Europe...

There are reports of miracles
here in this place...

God has sided with those who are oppressed
and unfree.

God has taken a stand against those who oppress, hate and prevent freedom.

God is on your side,
against your darkness and your need,
against your powerlessness and fear.

No matter how hopeless the hopelessness may seem. He will lead you out of slavery into the land of the living.

Trust him, because that is who he is.
You are looking for Jesus?
He is no longer on the place of death.
He leads to the land of the living.

And all that remains are
deserted lands of bondage
and *empty tombs*.

::: Amen.