

Choir Festival 2019 Braunschweig, 12 May 2019

Suche Frieden und jage ihm nach Psalm 34,15

Soek Vrede en jaag dit na Psalm 34,15

Seek Peace and pursue it Psalm 34,15

Mad man in the house! Screams, banging against posts, scratching the furniture, wild gestures, foam around the mouth, banging his head against the walls - who is this man? Take him away before he causes damage!

“Oh king Abimelek, this is the one who killed our hero Goliath! This is the one about whom the people say: Saul killed thousand, David killed ten thousand!”

“Take him away! Can’t you see he is mad? He might have been an excellent soldier - but now he is “bossies”, useless, only a danger to himself! Away with him.”

And David goes away.

David was not mad. He was at a low in life - after secretly being anointed as king by Samuel, after killing Goliath and leading the troops of Saul into victorious battle, after becoming the darling of all, he had to flee for his life, because king Saul had decided to have him killed.

Fleeing “halsüberkopf” he finds himself in Gat, home town of Goliath. What was he thinking? Or did he assume that no one would recognize him as the slayer of their hero? So, fleeing to save his life, he finds himself in the “lion’s den”, and is soon recognised as the one who killed the local hero. They take him to the king, Abimelek. The danger is even bigger than before.

And that is when he pretends to be mad - hoping that that will help him out of this dangerous situation.

This is where Psalm 34 was born. The heading reads:

“A Psalm of David, when he pretended to be insane before Abimelek, who drove him away, and he left”

I must confess that it was only in preparation for this sermon that I noticed this heading. Up to now my focus had been on verse 15, the watchword for 2019, to a large extent ignoring the rest of the Psalm.

But when I take note of this heading, it gives a totally different and new meaning to the watchword for 2019. We need to start at verse 12.

In verse 12-15 of Psalm 34 we read: **“Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.”**

David loves life, desires to see many good days. He definitely is not ready to die yet, and not at the hands of his enemies in the town of Goliath!

He wants to live, and in order to live, he has to flee, and now, in this situation has to find a way out. Acting insane is the way to go! At least it’s worth a try!

Dear sisters and brothers, up to now, whenever I read the watchword for 2019, I read it in plural, as a call addressed to us all. Both English and Afrikaans do not distinguish between singular and plural. But actually the German translation states: Suche Frieden - this instruction is in the singular. Somehow I kept on thinking: Suchet Frieden und jaget ihm nach - a word to a nation - and so I focussed on the meaning of this verse for our country. This part of the Psalm however is not addressing a nation, nor a group of people, but speaking to individuals. “If you, my friend, want life, if you want to see good days - seek peace, pursue it!” It is quite personal!

When David was in Gat, he was alone, totally alone - but he did not give up. There, in this hopeless situation, he acted insane, At that moment acting insane was the way forward, the only way for him to seek peace and pursue it!

Seek peace - this watchword isn’t a challenge to us as group, but rather to each one of us individually. Our situations differ, our challenges vary. So does the way to pursue peace. What works with me, does not necessarily work with you.

Seeking peace can take many forms - it can involve negotiations, asking for forgiveness and forgiving. In some situations it might even involve acting like a mad man, allowing yourself to be belittled, ridiculed - losing face to save face!

It is not a matter of “peace at all costs” - but rather: Peace, because I love life, peace, because I want to see good days - for me, and for our people, our nation, our world.

We can make a difference - and today I want to turn it to the singular: you, my friend, can make a difference!

We have gathered here in Braunschweig - an area affected by the sad split of Churches more than a century ago. This split continues through families, causing hurt and separation. “Seek peace” - I am glad that this morning we have sisters and brothers from Felsisa attending, celebrating with us. And I am glad that you are having services together on other occasions.

Our choir is a mixed choir. We live in a divided country with lots of racial tension. I am glad that the singers all decided to come, to attend, not to fall into this pit of prejudice, but to sing together to the glory of God - another way of seeking peace.

(In the run-up to the elections many people said: I am not going to vote - it does not make a difference any way.

17 656 712 people cast their votes. What difference would my vote have made anyway? Well, think of it this way: 17 656 712 individuals stood in queues somewhere - from Putsunderwater to London or Washington. 17 656 712 individuals stood in a voting booth, looking at the long list of parties and made their cross.

9.099.936 individuals did not vote. Nine Million individuals might have given the election a completely different result. Nine million thought they cannot make a difference. But they could have!

Seek peace, pursue it. Don’t think: I cannot make a difference anyway. I am one against millions.)

Seek peace - Jesus, in a strange way, followed a similar approach to David, when he allowed himself to be ridiculed, maltreated and belittled. But he did not do it to save his life. He did it, because he “loves life” - the life of all of us. Unlike David, who walked away, Jesus died as an “insane” man on the cross - and in that process actually brought peace where no peace was to be expected!

When we now sing “Dona nobis pacem” - Lord, give us peace - we do it together.

The song will only work if we do not abstain from singing. Each of our voices will contribute, and because of each one that sings, the hymn will rise.

Do not underestimate your voice, your own, single journey to seek peace. Our country needs peace. YOU can contribute!

Amen

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