



VI ER OGSÅ KIRKEN
- en forening af katolikker

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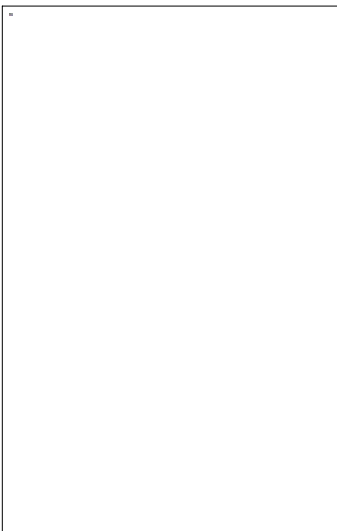
24-jan-2007

Den årlige økumeniske kirkevandring fandt sted den 23-jan-07.

Deltagerne besøgte Sct.Pauls Kirke (folkekirke), Jerusalemskirken (metodist), Sct.Ansgar Kirke (romersk katolsk), Sct. Aleksandr Nevski Kirke ((russisk-ortodoks), St.Alban's Church (anglikansk) og Svenska Gustafskyrkan (svensk luthers kirke),

I Gustafskyrkan holdt præsten fra den engelske kirke følgende prædiken, idet kirkevandringen motto var:

"Han får både de døve til at høre og de stumme til at tale" (Markus 7,37).



The Ven. Mark Oakley, Archdeacon of Germany and Northern Europe, Priest of St

Alban's Anglican Church, Copenhagen

"Han får både de døve til at høre og de stumme til at tale" (Markus 7,37).

It is a great honour to be invited to speak here this evening, an honour for me personally but also for all of us at St Alban's church. Thank you very much. Thank you also for allowing me to preach in English – this is both easier for me and a lot less painful for you.

The last ecumenical event I attended in Copenhagen was a fascinating seminar with Prince Hassan of Jordan. At one point he was asked about the English. "Ah", he said. "The English". "Well, they say the sun never sets on their Empire but this is because God does not trust them in the dark".

God does not trust them in the dark. I wonder, as we gather here tonight in the dark, whether he trusts us? Does he trust our intentions, does he trust the sincerity of our words, of our prayers, does he trust that we mean and will act on what we are saying tonight – or is it just something we feel we have to do at this time of year and tomorrow nothing will have changed? Does God trust us in the dark tonight? Will we practice what we pray for?

The Gospel reading tonight from Mark's Gospel tells the story of Jesus's healing of the deaf and dumb man. And Mark was not just a literalist, he knew that such healings were only understood by their spiritual meaning. Immediately before this story Mark tells us about the crowds and the disciples not understanding what Jesus is teaching, but now a man's ears are unblocked and his tongue released, the world changes for him and by that strange word: ephphatha: be opened.

It is a good word for tonight, for a group of Christians from different traditions, as we know our need to be more open to each other. And we don't need to be open to each other just because we are nice polite people. I'm English – I know how inauthentic politeness can be! We need to be open and to listen to one another because not one of us alone can say everything that needs to be said about God and his body-language, his self-portrait we know as Jesus Christ. Christ is only properly encountered in the community of all the baptized, befriending, engaging and sometimes arguing with one another, so that what I and my tradition isn't saying or can't say is added to or corrected by friends in another tradition. As Christians we need to maintain both the dignity of difference and the scandal of indifference. Only in this way can we become, in the words of the Anglican bishop Desmond Tutu, the rainbow people of God - unity not uniformity. As the man in the Gospel's ears were healed so his speech was corrected – it is true, our ability to listen or not affects what we say, what we bring, what is offered for good or

ill. If God is to trust all our words tonight it will only be because we have committed ourselves afresh to listen again and learn more.

But we are not just a talking shop. Jesus said that his real brothers and sisters were those who heard and did, not those who just got together and said what a lovely man he is. The healing we heard just now of course is very much part of the ministry that Jesus outlined for himself, using the ancient words of Isaiah at the beginning of Luke's gospel: to bring good news, recovery of sight to the blind, release to the imprisoned, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the favour of God. We hear those words so often we might have got deaf to them. The conversion of the converted is the hardest of all for we can end up seeing the ink on the page and missing the fire. But Jesus, still wet from his baptism, uses these words to describe his work – and all of us, similarly wet with baptism, have this same ministry entrusted to us. In England we say that blood is thicker than water, family is stronger than anything else. But for Christians water is thicker than blood – our baptism draws us together into a family that seeks a revolution because of a revelation, that prays and seeks to help bring in God's kingdom. And if we fail here, then we fail as Christians, our heartbeat will have stopped and God will not trust our words tonight. By the way, if you ever want to check your values – look at your bank statement and see where you are literally placing value.

An English bishop about a hundred years ago left a will and asked for it to be read out on his death. It said: "Tell my priests when I am gone, over me to shed no tears. For I shall be no deader then, than they have been for years". Well, it is easy to spot the cracks and flaws in the human church. But as Christians we are on a spiritual adventure and our goal is life, life resuscitated, refreshed, recovered and in fulness, for us and for all people. Nietzsche said that Christianity would be a lot more convincing if Christians actually looked redeemed! We are to become what we celebrate. Preach the gospel at all times, said blessed Francis, and if you must - use words.

Because it is clear that we are spending our lives in a world where people are oppressed, trapped, nervous and anxious; a time where we are in danger of losing wisdom because we are distracted by surplus information, a time of spending money we don't have on things we don't want in order to impress people we don't like, lots to live with, little to live for - and we need and yearn for words that resonate, resuscitate, refresh us, words that knead hope back into our humanity, and for relationships that are deep. We are also living at a time when there are so many voices shouting at us: be beautiful, be thin, be rich, vote for me, eat quickly, don't trust them, get a better car (in adverts, is the man having an affair with the woman or the car?). And because our humanity is fractured in these and so many ways, we also have loud voices inside ourselves telling us things: beating ourselves up or showing off – both so often variations on the feeling that "I'm not loveable". But in the Gospels we learn that to be baptised is to begin to listen, not to the story being told about us by the commentators or the fashionable, and not even to the stories we tell ourselves, but to begin to listen to the story God is telling us about us, to hear his favour, to learn his lesson that we are cherished and for always (once in a school assembly I asked the children what happened on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. They knew! When I asked what had happened on the Saturday though only one girl put her hand up – "I think Jesus went into hell to look for his friend Judas" she said. That is the Gospel -to reach for people in their private hells, of

others or their own making, to reach and hold them. Who dares to do this alone? Christians need each other.

So, can God trust us in this task, the calling of the Church? We pray to *him* and call on his Spirit, the dove who can descend and nest on our humanity, defrosting it and enabling new things to hatch and be born. Our roots need his rain so our branches can grow. We say to *ourselves*, ephaptha, be opened, open to friends and new insights, new partnerships, that more might be achieved and our words will be richer, and more resonate. We say to *each other*, for all our differences and disagreements, will you walk with me and we'll see where friendship will take us? Just imagine if every church represented here tonight just made one decision this year to do something together with another church of a different tradition that they do not know very well. What things might be born, for us all, for God? Can we translate our words and talk of unity that far?

God doesn't trust the English in the dark. I don't blame him. But can he trust us here now tonight? Time will tell. But our task is as clear as it ever was: that we will work to make the Church of God in Copenhagen a large house of welcome and not self contained flats, and that we will welcome especially those who believe no one could ever love them because to God these are dearest of all, and that we will walk together not just one night of the year but always, and speak together too when a world is blind and dumb and needs setting free.

May the Spirit of the Lord be on you: bring good news, release, recover and reach out and so enlarge for people this gift we know as life, this mystery and power we know as love and - Ephaptha, be opened. Amen

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