

Grace be with you, and peace, from God our Father and our Lord, Jesus Christ

Isa 11,1-8 (New International Version)

1 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. 2 The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord— 3 and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; 4 but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. 5 Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. 6 The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. 7 The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. 8 The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.

Dear sisters and brothers,

once it actually succeeded, only once, but still this one time. In the Christuskirche in Oberbilk, which was still for itself at that time, there was a congregation with people from Ghana, and for a while another one, from South Korea, in addition to the German one. The parish celebrated a parish festival. A celebration of three nations, three continents, three languages, three cultures, with people from places that one can hardly imagine further apart. No one would ever have had the idea: We're going to celebrate an East Asian, West African and Central European community festival. You have to come up with that first.

But the people were there. They needed a place to worship and so they met. So they celebrated worship together. Afterwards they ate and drank in and around the church with Korean, Ghanaian and German cuisine, they talked and sang and the children played and they had their fun. And suddenly it was not only theology and theory. Suddenly it was tangible and you could experience it by yourself, the worldwide body of Christ. One Lord, one faith, one baptism. As in the times of the New Testament: People did not seek each other. But they were brought together. Through the common faith. Through the word of God. Through Christ himself.

This parish festival - I don't know how long ago it was - was a parable for what the letter to the Ephesians already marveled at: He is our peace. He has made the many into one. And we didn't even plan it that way.

The prophet Isaiah has already told about him - at least we Christians have discovered him again in his stories, on whom the spirit of the Lord rests. One does not come at all on that. Already the idea is completely crazy. That is not possible at all. One cannot imagine that at all: *The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down*

*together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.*

What the prophet describes here is what is called "Shalom" in Israel. It is clear that this shalom is not in the power of human beings. It is not something we can do. It needs the creative initiative of God himself. Isaiah does not say: Do it. Then it will work out. Rather, he says: It is not in your power.

We are completely overwhelmed with the task of creating peace, shalom, a habitable earth. We Christians are people who know that. And that is why we do not even try.

Instead, we call on the name of God, or in other words, we call on God in the name of Jesus. Because we believe that he creates shalom. And that he has already begun it. Where trust blossoms. Where it grows. What we bring to the world is not our readiness for peace, our will for peace, our capacity for peace. That would not distinguish us from others. That would not be what makes us. What we bring is our longing for God, our trust. Our poverty and our inability. Our hope and our prayer. That is what we can offer. We do not have anything else.

So we make our way through the times and through our battered and threatened world, which is still God's creation, God's world. On these paths we meet people who have the same trust, the same hope as we do. One day I met two men from Ghana. I had yet to understand that we share the same faith. They had to be very patient until they could explain to me what they wanted. One of them was Matthew Owusu. He was someone who knew exactly what he wanted, who was not easily impressed and who did not let himself be put off by anything. Today we remember him with this service. We miss him very much. His unexpected and sudden death was painful for us. But I personally am grateful that we met.

But I would also like to mention the name of the second of the two who visited me back then - I mean, it was 1999, but you will know that more precisely. He is with us today. That was Boama Mensah. Your exemplary organized congregational life is carried by many, which is typical for Presbyterians. The services, mostly without a minister, carried by many, were moving. But you two were my contacts. I had the closest contact with Boama Mensah, even though we always had trouble communicating because German is not his language and English is not mine, and he occasionally had to groan because I am so hard to get on the phone. But his persistence, his patience, his determination have impressed me greatly.

I do not conceal the fact that there were also fractures, conflicts, divisions. The relationship with the Christuskirchengemeinde was difficult. Then you made a painful separation within your own congregation. It was probably inevitable, and it highlights the dichotomy in which migrant congregations like yours find themselves: on the one hand, loyalty to the homeland, to origins, to familiar traditions. On the other hand, the insight: Now we live here. Now we are at home here. We do not remain sitting on packed suitcases, but we unpack them. You had to go into exile and needed a new place. After the previous experiences, I was sure that it would never work in the

Lutherkirchengemeinde. And today I have a great deal of respect for this congregation for accepting the responsibility and granting you the location. This crossing of boundaries was not a matter of course, but courageous, because it changed the own congregation.

So we go our ways as people who put everything on Christ, through threatened times, through a battered world, hoping for the shalom that only God can bring about. Sometimes side by side, sometimes on separate paths, sometimes with unexpected encounters, but never alone. We let ourselves be surprised where God sends us, who crosses our paths, who needs us and whom he puts at our side.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.