

He is the Son

Reading: Lk 15,11-32

Supplementary reading: Lev 20,9

On the first Sunday of Advent this story tells us about the God who became flesh in Jesus. It is a story about a father with two sons who both hate him. The prodigal says it out loud when he demands his part. The elder brother, then, refuses to rejoice with the father: for him, his own feeling of righteousness is more important than his brother's life or his father's joy.

There is nothing uncommon about the younger son: there have been many who wished their parents demise, and many more have left the family home alone. The reaction of his father, however, is quite outstanding. We have read in the Book of Leviticus what is the punishment of a disrespectful son – but this father does as his son wishes and lets him leave unharmed. The symbol of a mighty and disciplined character crumbles before our eyes. His power is not in executing his own will at every cost, but in accepting the loss and carrying his sorrow, year after year after year. His pain, that his son wants him dead, grew every day as he looked upon the horizon, waiting for his son to return. His power is hidden in his powerlessness: that he carries the burden, that he remembers, and that he forgives. Could you greet someone with even the faintest smile if they did something wrong to you? How unspeakable is then the way he embraces his son when he comes back!

He is unlike the elder son. Jesus speaks to them, to the Pharisees, to Israel, and addresses them in the elder son: you should rejoice, that your brother is alive – he was dead, but now he lives! It is clear here that the elder son hates his father just as much the younger did, and he needs his father to come before him – just as much as the younger did. We, the Church, are the elder son of our days. We, to whom our position, prosperity and righteousness are more important than the lives of our brothers and sisters – and the joy of the Father. We are outraged by the limitless grace of God, who always seeks the opportunity to forgive, while we love to keep grudges and are afraid to forgive. We are afraid of appearing weak.

The Father, however, not only seeks the opportunity to forgive, but He creates it in Jesus Christ. He, who is light and life, suffered a gruesome death on the cross. He carried our burdens, which we could not even grasp. He is the Son, who loves the Father and lives according to Him: going after the lost and giving His life for them and leaving the joy of heaven behind to convince the stubborn elder son. He, who sacrificed Himself for those who despised and even hated Him, He died for his enemies, He died for us. In Him, the heart of the father was made known to everyone. True power and might through self-sacrifice and unlimited love in His weakest.

Sermon of Dániel Ilosva. Zwolle, 27th November, 2022