



Lutheran Church in Great Britain

30, Thanet Street

LONDON WC1H 9QH

T+44(0)20 7383 0301

www.lutheranchurch.co.uk

From the Bishop, the Rt Revd Dr Martin Lind

ADVENT 2018

To
The Pastors and All The Baptised of the
Lutheran Church in Great Britain

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

This autumn has been filled with Brexit negotiations with so many steps and measures. The main question is still not completely solved. Most of us in our church are wondering about the outcome of Brexit and worrying about the forthcoming international relations. In a way the whole Brexit issue is a part of the new national egoism that so clearly is influencing our world today.

We can see a pattern of segregation in contrast to the Christian pattern of belonging. In the creation already the Christian faith gives us the gift of belonging, belonging to God and belonging to the whole of humanity, the animals, the vegetation, the stars, the moon, the sun and the entire universe.

In Advent time we used to find time for self-criticism, for reflection of our own participation in that which could have been better in this world. In the light of our political development it is worthwhile thinking of our shortcomings to influence the political world with Christian perspectives of solidarity and togetherness.

In one of the biblical texts often used in Advent time we hear Jesus telling us: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” (Mark 1, 15).

There are two words in Greek language for “time”: *kronos* and *kairos*. The first word is in our Western tradition a part of chronology, the time from the beginning to the end. The second word is used for qualified time, the time just now. It is this latter word that Jesus chooses.

We may dream of other times – it is not difficult in our wounded world. Some of us may look backwards, for the time of yesterday, for circumstances and conditions long time ago. Some will dream of a new future, where difficulties are gone and we could live in a new community.

*But Jesus reminds us of the present time, **the most important time of our lives**.* The kingdom of God is near, in the time just now.

In this time Jesus gives us two appeals: *repent* and *believe*.

Repent is the most misunderstood word of the two.

It has largely been given the meaning of changing our lives morally: do live a little better; behave better towards people even those whom you don’t really like.

This kind of moral suggestions is not wrong, of course, but far away from the meaning of *repent*.

In the original Greek language of the New Testament this word literally means “turn” or “turn around” (μεταβοίη). I would say: turn to the face of God.

I myself have a longing to look into the eyes of the crucifix. To look into the eyes of Jesus is in a way to be seen.

The icons may be instruments in a similar way. Sometimes the icons are called “windows of heaven”. In a way you may look at the eyes of Jesus in the icons and feel that you are seen. Often the eyes of the old icons are bigger than normal eyes. Is it an invitation to look at the eyes and be seen by them?

In the crucifix and in the icons – all pictures made by human hands – we may find the divine in the human. We may believe that God looks at us, and makes our fragility and weaknesses fall away so that God’s own image, his creation, remains.

In the divine light in the human eyes I may feel God’s look. I may see myself in a new light, who I am, loved by God, given some years on earth to live the life God wants.

“Turn around”, says Jesus, “turn yourself towards my eyes and my face. Live in front of my face and you will be blessed!” – in this way we may interpret the words in the Mark gospel.

In front of the face of Jesus it is also easy to believe in the good news. The good news could be summed up in many ways and one way is just this: you are seen by the eyes of Jesus, your are blessed by his face. The Lord makes his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

I don’t need to do anything. I don’t need to change my whole life. I don’t need to moralise over my life.

I just need the face of Jesus and his eyes. There is the blessing for me.

This blessing has of course consequences. In Advent time it might be appropriate to reflect on these consequences.

Our God does not only bless us, bless me, but everybody. I know that everybody does not ask for his blessing. But we believe in our Christian tradition that God blesses the entire universe. We just don't believe that enough. Therefore we have to pray and ask for it, again and again.

God's blessing of the universe should remind us of our belonging to all other people and the creation. We have a special commission to fight for the divine value of every human being and for God's creation at a whole.

At Christmas we are again reminded of the divine in the human, and this time the divine incarnation in the most fragile of all human beings, the infant. That is our comfort: when we experience the greatest fragility in our life, Christmas will assure us: God is with us - every day and every night.

*

Our Senior Administrator Rosanna Horridge has returned after her maternity leave. We were lucky to have Nikki Renken with us during the time Rosanna was away, but now we happy to welcome Rosanna back in service.

Next Synod will take place Saturday 27 April 2019 in Augustana Centre in London. We will have a German visit this time. One of the seven Vice Presidents of LWF, with special responsibility for Central Western Europe, The Very Revd Astrid Kleist will come as well as Rev Norbert Denecke, the general secretary of the German National Committee of LWF.

At our Synod we will have the opportunity to hear reports from the on-going work within the LWF and there will be possibilities to discuss the future.

On the forthcoming Sunday, 28 April, both Astrid Kleist and Norbert Denecke have promised to preach and speak in St Anne's, Astrid at the Sunday Eucharist and Norbert at the Bach Vespers at the evening.

My time as an LCiGB bishop is running out. I was once elected for a period of six years, 2014-2019, but I promised only three years. Now it is time for me to leave. I am convinced that the Holy Spirit will bless the forthcoming election so that LCiGB soon will get a new bishop.

*

I wish you by all my heart a Blessed Christmas
And a Good New Year

Pray for me as I pray for you

+ Martin