Evangelical Church Berlin-Brandenburg-Silesian Upper Lusatia, Bishop Dr Dr h.c. Markus Dröge,

Sermon on Laetare Sunday,

Service at St Paul's Cathedral, London,

31 March 2019, Gen. 4:1-16

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.*

I.

Dear brothers and sisters here at St Paul's Cathedral in London!

First of all, I would like to convey to you cordial greetings from my church, the Evangelical Church Berlin-Brandenburg-Silesian Upper Lusatia. We were delighted that we could welcome the Bishop of London, Ms Sarah Mullally, as our guest last weekend. She preached at Berlin Cathedral, moving our hearts. She asked us to follow the example of God in turbulent times and walk in the ways of love as beloved children.

I shall now express my delight that you invited me to return the visit of your bishop to Berlin and to be with you today. By making these two visits at a time when we are profoundly moved by the discussions and decisions regarding the Brexit[1], we as Christians in Berlin and London wish to make clear: We are connected with one another, regardless of the political decisions of our governments. And we remain connected with one another. We are baptised in the name of our God. That is the reason for our solidarity. Therefore, I am here today.

II.

I am still moved by an idea Bishop Sarah mentioned during her sermon at Berlin Cathedral last Sunday. She reminded us of the story of Cain and Abel, those two brothers coming into conflict with each other right at the beginning of the Bible.

[1] "Proposed referendum on United Kingdom membership of the European Union" or "withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union".

There was no objective reason for this conflict. There was only a feeling: The elder brother thought he was not being noticed sufficiently. His hatred arose and was directed against his younger brother. Bishop Sarah has reminded us: Anyone feeling overlooked must not reject and hate his brother like Cain did, solely because he needs someone he can blame.

Since last Sunday, I have continued to reflect on this story. It is alarming how much envy and jealousy can affect a human being. After all, the first act of violence in human history happened. Why did it happen? There was no reason for hatred at all. There was simply a human being who envied another one, since he believed to be ignored by God. “Why am I not seen? Why does God not see me?“

This question again appears in this Sunday's gospel, Jesus telling us the Parable of the Prodigal Son: The older brother begrudges his younger brother the joy of the father. He angrily asks: “Why does no one see what faithful services I have done for years? Why does no one see me?” - Is it not remarkable that the Bible pays so much attention to a conflict between two brothers? Obviously, the Holy Scripture wants to make us aware of something relating to us.

Before Cain commits an act of violence against his brother Abel, God shortly interfered. God looks at Cain. It is *not* how Cain has believed it to be. He is quite looked at by God, even looked at in love that is full of care. God does notice that Cain is angry. And He addresses him: “*Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?*” (Gen. 4:6). God asks again: *What are you annoyed by*? And He does not get an answer by Cain. After that, God continues: “*If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it”* (Gen. 4:7).

God wants to warn Cain of losing his temper with an innocent. He reminds him of his responsibility.

I conclude: We are responsible for ensuring that anger does not turn into hatred and violence.

III.

We are living in turbulent times. We are now witnessing how people get angry, since they believe they are not taken seriously enough. They believe, that their interests are insufficiently represented and others are preferred. We are experiencing that these sentiments change our societies: Selfish thinking spreads and political leaders polarising many people receive attention and have success. We are also experiencing how much hatred, anger and dispute can arise and how many joint achievements are threatened to get lost.

What mission do we as Christians have to carry out in such turbulent times?

Not long ago, November last year, we held a memorial service at Berlin Cathedral, recalling the end of the First World War. This war caused immense suffering within the European nations and all over the world. The idea to establish a united Europe dates back to the experiences gained with World War I and World War II. And we remembered in this service, that the European Union is a peace project.

The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Berlin and I celebrated the memorial service in November last year as an international and ecumenical service, including representatives from France, Russia, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia as well as Bishop Jonathan Robert Gibbs from Huddersfield who represented your church, and Christians belonging to the Greek Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church. On this occasion, in November, we reminded ourselves how important it is to further strengthen and carry forward the peace project Europe by our prayers and partnerships just now, in turbulent times.

We reminded all participants of an essential declaration that had been adopted by the Christians of Europe in 2001. This declaration is called, the *Charta Oecumenica*, obliging the European Christians of all denominations to promote the process of European integration, to advocate the dialogue of the religions with combined effort, to protect creation, to treat refugees with dignity and to keep alive the memory of the guilt the churches have loaded onto them, because in history they have not done enough to prevent mutual hatred between the European Nations. This *Charta Oecumenica* was an important signal in 2001. Nowadays, it is more necessary than ever to hear and live this self-commitment. Now that the European idea is questioned in many member states, our mutual commitment as Christians has to prove itself.

IV.

*"And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it"* (Gen. 4:7). God asks Cain to assume responsibility. He wants to learn about Cain's piety and his personal devotion to God. Here is the key. If we commit ourselves to God, our view will become free from envy, jealousy and hatred. This way, we can open up the view for the other ones around us. This way, we can assume our responsibility for peace.

God sees us. Me and you, and all who do not feel perceived. God looks at us lovingly. That is what we are told by Jesus and His Parable of the Prodigal Son.

Amen.

Translation from German into English, using the New King James Version (NKJV): Jörg Schneider