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That he may lead us on the way of Peace.

Predigt in Sado am Sonntag 2.9. 2007, Lukas 1, 76-79

May the Grace of God, the love of his Son Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of us.

Lord be with us and open the ears of our hearts that we may realize that you are talking to us.

Luke 1, 76 - 79.

76 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High God.

You will go ahead of the Lord to prepare the way for him.

77 You will tell his people how they can be saved.

You will tell them that their sins can be forgiven.

78 All of that will happen because our God is tender and caring.

His kindness will bring the rising sun to us from heaven.

79 It will shine on those living in darkness

and in the shadow of death.

It will guide our feet on the path of peace."

NIRV

And you, child, will be named the prophet of the Most High: you will go before the face of the Lord, to make ready his ways; ⁷⁷ To give knowledge of salvation to his people, through the forgiveness of sins, ⁷⁸ Because of the loving mercies of our God, by which the dawn from heaven has come to us, ⁷⁹ To give light to those in dark places, and in the shade of death, so that our feet may be guided into the way of peace.

Basic English

Dear friends,

first of all I want to thank God and to thank you for giving me this precious chance to deliver this sermon this morning.

I stand before you as a German and as a German I am aware of the German history in the last century. I was born in 1953 8 years after the end of World War II. As one of the silly German Chancellors has done I might say I have been born late enough to bear no personal responsibility. But I am well aware of that I as an individual are part of the collective. Whether I like it or not I have been born as a German and I'm part of the German people. So I share in our collective memory and the history of World War II is part of my history.

I think what I told you is not something strange to you. Whenever I come to Japan I feel strongly, that we have something in common. From many conversations I know, that many friends in Japan are struggling themselves with the question how to deal with the past. This is especially true at a day like this. When I was asked to deliver this sermon I was not aware what an important date the 2nd of Sept is. But two weeks ago I have seen a documentary in the German TV about the Post war history in Japan and I learnt that 62 years ago on 2nd of Sept. 1945 the Capitulation of Japan has been signed by the representatives of the Japanese Government and the imperial Army.

What does it mean to us as Christians that we as Germans and as Japanese have part in the sad history of our respective people? How should we deal with the past? And what does this past mean for the future? What is our role as Christians in our respective societies and in the world?

In Germany as well as in Japan there are strong voices that we should not be too much preoccupied with by our past. There are people who simply want to do away with the past. And in both countries unfortunately there are still people who glorify the past.

I sometimes feel that there is still some kind of depression with quite many people. They are unable to say with a certain self respect but without arrogance that they are Germans. And I'm deeply aware of that we have a broken relationship with our past which affects our self perception and our identity.

Howsoever neither neglecting the past nor glorifying it will help us to work for a better future. The only way is to accept the past as it is with all the guilt it involves, with all the shadows which are only too obvious. It is an old psychological knowledge which we find in all cultures, that only if we accept the shadow the light can shine bright.

The crucial question now is: How can we achieve this that we simply accept the past?

For us as Christians the good news of the bible is opening this way. Let's have a look what the bible is telling us today.

Today's Bible reading has been taken from the Gospel of Luke. Luke is very special. In his Gospel we find many stories which we do not find in the other three gospels. For example the beautiful story of the lost son and his merciful father; or the Story of the good Samaritan. Only here we find those stories related to the birth of Jesus. Here in the Gospel of Luke Jesus is described from the very beginning as the one saviour for all the people. We remember how the angels were proclaiming: *"Have no fear; for truly, I give you good news of great joy which will be for all the people: ¹¹ For on this day, in the town of David, a Saviour has come to birth, who is Christ the Lord."* In the German bible instead of the term Saviour the term "Heiland" is used. Jesus is the one who came to heal, and he can heal even the secret wounds of our hearts.

Even before Jesus was born Zacharias the father of John is singing the wonderful song we just have heard. He is describing the role of John and Jesus.

About John he says:

You will tell the people how they can be saved.

You will tell them that their sins can be forgiven.

Isn't this wonderful news? Here we find the answer how we can achieve it, that we accept our past: If we know that the sins of the past are forgiven, then there is no need any more to neglect or to glorify the past. We just can accept it and we can say: Yes in the past our people has done terrible things....

If we do so, then we make the experience that God is *tender and caring*. Again wonderful and poetic expressions of how God is dealing with us: *tender and caring*. And *his light is shining* upon us and in our hearts. Then we do not have to fight against the shadow, because even the shadow becomes light. And then it happens, *that our feet are guided on the path of peace."*

The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer who in Japan is even more famous than in Germany once said: I believe that even out of evil God can make something good and for God it is not more difficult to straighten out our misdeeds than to deal with what we call our good deeds.

With Bonhoeffer I believe that if we look at the dark past of our people even there we can discover God's calling. He in his grace is not condemning us, but he is calling us. He is calling us the people in Germany and in Japan to work for peace in an earnest and in a dedicated way.

It would be the task of a lecture to give kind of an outline what this means today: I just only can mention some aspects and raise some questions:

How are we dealing with the people from other countries who are living among us: Are they just only strangers or are we ready to accept them at least as Neighbours? And if we get ready to be guided in the way of peace we may discover that they are even more: they too are part of the family of men and they are our brothers and sisters.

How do we deal with neighbouring countries which had to suffer so much because of us? After we have heard the good news and after having been reconciled with God are we ready to work for reconciliation? I'm glad that I have met so many friends from Japan who came to Korea and as a living sign of reconciliation have been struggling for the rights of the Comfort women or the Korean victims of the Atomic Bomb. Every time Korean and Japanese people meet with open hearts miracles happen and the wounds of the past are healed and people experience the presence of the "Heiland" of the saviour.

One more subject: As a person who has visited North Korea several times and who is deeply concerned with the fate of the suffering North Korean people I hope and pray that Japanese politicians play an active role in the process of peace and

reconciliation on the Korean peninsula. I'm grateful that the NCCJ already is very active in this respect.

Last not least I want to mention that sometimes the spirit of God who has been with the prophets' urges us today to raise a prophetic voice, if we feel that things are going on, which are not right. I'm glad that at least parts of the church in our countries are doing this.

To walk in the ways of the Lord may sometime not be easy, but I'm sure if we ask God, our feet will be guided into the way of peace and he will bless us and we will be a blessing for our people. Amen