

Sermon about Ez 18, 1-4+21-24+30-32 on 3rd Sunday a. Trinity 2022 in BXL (IV)

Greeting: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Bible: 1 The word of the Lord came to me: 2 “What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? 3 As I live, declares the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. 4 Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die. 21 “But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. 22 None of the transgressions that he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness that he has done he shall live. 23 Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? 24 But when a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice and does the same abominations that the wicked person does, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds that he has done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which he is guilty and the sin he has committed, for them he shall die. 30 “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. 31 Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? 32 For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live.”

Sermon: 1. *Family with shadows:* Family is a tough world. Having grown up in traditional, extended family in a village and after several years as a pastor, I

have often been able to look behind the facades of many families. Of course, the family is the nucleus of community and society, a shelter, a support network and a place of security. That is what it should be. But despite all this, the family is also more often than we think a place of entanglements and psychological and spiritual chains that hold people captive. In the meantime, I have come to realise that the majority of families carry a more or less big problem around with them and through the times. Mostly it is disagreements and quarrels, but it can also be trauma from war, flight or rape or abuse, or an addiction like alcoholism. These things have a profound impact.

When you think about what family is supposed to be and then see how these dark shadows weigh on families, they are sad stories. - It is equally psychologically interesting and depressing to see how such stories and traumas run through the ages and generations. It is now scientifically studied that trauma can be inherited through two to three generations. Thus, the children's and even grandchildren's generation still suffer from the fate of their parents and grandparents. Famous stories like "Romeo and Juliet" are just one artistically processed topic.

2. *Sour grapes and blunt teeth:* It is precisely this realisation that picks up on the ancient oriental proverb quoted by God, presumably widespread, about sour grapes, which are still blamed for children's blunt teeth. It is familiar to people. We encounter it almost identically in the book of the prophet Jeremiah. It takes up the habit of eating still unripe sour grapes, which was probably popular in ancient times.

One can understand this proverb as a lament. But from a cultural-scientific point of view, such proverbs are above all a psychological relief. Things that have to be accepted and endured through no fault of their own become

explicable and thus more bearable. And so this proverb becomes an excuse here: the parents' generation is responsible. What are we supposed to do? It is our fate! In the case of the people of Israel at the time of the prophet Ezekiel, it describes the fact that they have to live in exile in Babylon, deported and far from home without a temple, because the parents had turned against God. To stay with the image: "Why should the exiles in Babylon still brush their teeth when their ancestors have ruined them anyway?"

3. The Pass-on-sin-game: That's the human being. When it comes to showing responsibility for ourselves, we become sluggish, push away the cause. It's been that way since Adam and Eve. " "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." [...] "The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'" (Gen 3:12-13) The sluggishness of sitting on the sofa instead of moving and doing something for body and mind is only the very top, thin layer of the huge iceberg that lies mostly hidden under the water surface of our existence. One can find many examples where we avoid difficulties with ourselves and especially with the people around us, because we are afraid of effort and perhaps of a clarifying conflict.

But here, in the prophetic word of Ezekiel, it becomes existential. It is no longer about my multilingual children not learning my mother tongue because it is too much trouble for me to speak it consistently with them. It is about consistently keeping to God and his word. It's about not just letting God be a kind man (another such apologetic saying), but taking my spiritual destiny seriously. It is about not turning away from God, that is, giving in to sin. For the consequences would be terrible: to no longer live according to God's Word is to fail. Socially, ethically and above all spiritually. The end is death. Not because God jealously

lusts to punish, but because turning away from God means turning away from life.

4. *God doesn't resign to it:* We humans are weak. We evade. We cannot pull ourselves out of the swamp of failure. But God is not resigned to this. He is not happy when his creatures and children, his chosen people, perish. He wants us to stop hiding behind others and our history, even our family history. He wants us to hear his voice, to perceive it, to lift our heads and look to him again and follow him. He wants us to finally turn back from all the ways that stand in the way of life. Above all, he wants us to get off the couch spiritually and get busy. God wants us to make a new heart and a new spirit. That means thinking anew and feeling anew. To switch on our brains and think about what is right and what is wrong and to use our heart, which feels and can love.

Making ourselves a new heart and a new spirit... To Lutheran ears this sounds challenging. Is that possible? Am I supposed to make my own salvation after all? After all, the psalmist prays: "Create in me, [you] God, a clean heart, and give me a new and steadfast spirit." (Ps 51:12) That sounds more like proper theology! - But the difference here is found in the original Hebrew: In our sermon passage the word *asah* is used in contrast to *bara*. *Bara* would actually mean "to create", to bring into being anew, out of nothing. Only God can do that. *Asah*, on the other hand, means "to make", "to produce from existing things". And in this sense it could perhaps be rendered here as "working on oneself". That is: I can make an effort to live according to God's word. That is what God is calling us to do here.

We human beings get used to situations far too quickly. God is not resigned. He says: forget the nonsense of the past! Come out of your doldrums and into your slippers! I don't want to lose you, I want to save you. God calls us to work

on ourselves. He Himself, takes the much more decisive part upon Himself: God comes to meet us as the merciful Father with open arms, as we heard in the Gospel. And through the reading from the Old Testament it becomes clear that God even intervenes physically with hand and foot. He tramples our sin flat, rolls up his sleeves and throws our sin far away into the sea. God wants us to live with him. Thanks be to God!

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