

Sermon about John 4, 19-26 on Pentecost 2023 in Brussels (V)

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: 19 The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” 21 Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” 25 The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.” 26 Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.”

Prayer: We pray with words of the Father of the Church Saint Augustine:
Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy. Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy. Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy. Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy. Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy. Amen.

Sermon: 1. Opener – the scene: Breathe in me, Holy Spirit, that my thoughts, ... work, ...love, ... defend. This is how Saint Augustine prays and thus already takes us on a good path to approaching this passage of Holy Scripture. Breathe, think, work, love, defend - these are not terms for immovable and unchanging things, but verbs (do-words). It is about movement and change. - What is the Scripture passage about here? What is happening? As the evangelist tells us a few verses earlier, Jesus is on his way with his disciples from Judea in the south,

where Jerusalem is, back to Galilee in the north. In between lies the landscape of Samaria, today's northern part of the West Bank, with the Old Testament early sanctuary on Mount Garizim. There the Samaritans, a Jewish breakaway, have a sanctuary in competition with the Jerusalem Temple. Of course, these two groups - the "normal" Jews and the Samaritans do not like each other. One can assume that it was not dangerous that Jesus and his disciples travelled through Samaria. But it was at least "uncomfortable". One could not hope for hospitality and help. - So far, so good. In the hot noon hour, they come to the historic site of Jacob's Well. Of course, there are hardly any people around at that time. The disciples go shopping in the nearby town. Jesus takes a rest at the well and meets this nameless woman there.

2. *God overcomes boundaries:* ...and a lively conversation develops between the two and sets things in motion. What is happening is doubly immoral: firstly, a Jew and a Samaritan woman meet here and secondly, a man and a woman talk to each other alone. "You can't do that!", Jesus' contemporaries and perhaps his disciples would exclaim. But conventions, traditions and human ideas of rules are precisely not an obstacle for God. On the contrary: what is often impossible for us is possible. In Jesus Christ, God overcomes boundaries with the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit overcomes boundaries. We have just heard in the epistle how he overcomes solid walls and closed doors, language barriers and the boundaries of human ideas and attitudes. He overcomes the border between Judea and Samaria. Human boundaries of origin, language, gender, age, health status, bank balance, attitude are not boundaries for God and in his kingdom! In Jesus Christ, all boundaries are overcome that limit people, fix you, bind you - even the boundary of death.

3. Lively talk and overflowing spirit: Now here, in the glaring midday sun, a lively and human dialogue develops. It is about very earthly things, about terribly sad, human fates. The poor woman has been married five times and has been widowed five times - perhaps she was divorced - as we must understand it in the verses before, which do not belong to the sermon passage. Now she lives unmarried with a new man. As far as her social standing is concerned, there is probably nothing left to rescue. The poor woman certainly has nothing left to laugh about in life. And that's probably why she's alone at the well at noon, where she doesn't have to run the risk of meeting someone else. And at the well it is about one of the most elementary human needs of all: drinking and water. Jesus promises her living water of life from a spring that never runs dry. And in the encounter with Jesus, in the conversation at eye level, the promise immediately begins to be fulfilled. Immediately after the conversation, it gushes out of the woman and she cannot help but run into the village and tell everyone about it. Without having understood everything, without knowing everything, without being absolutely sure in Jesus and above all, without fulfilling any things in advance, she is filled and filled with the Holy Spirit and is overflowing. (Wasn't it a bit like that after our last service a fortnight ago? Was it not as the Emmaus disciples said: "Did not our hearts burn within us?" (Lk 24, 32a) Without perhaps being able to speak everything, without having understood everything, we feel that there is "something" that touches us, changes us, makes our heart beat faster, perhaps makes tears roll, sets us in inner and outer motion). The woman encounters the truth of Jesus Christ. This is not truth in the sense of rightness and correctness. She did not first have to subscribe to any dogmas or profess certain propositions. The truth she encounters is honesty, sincerity. Jesus and the woman speak honestly with each other. They do not conceal anything and do not pretend. Such sincerity is

the precondition for a true, successful relationship, an encounter at eye level. The spirit of truth is at work here. Not a static thing, but movement. Those who are sincere with themselves and others can build relationships. And what is true for us among ourselves is also true for our relationship with God: Whoever does not hide or pretend before God, but is sincere, God has a relationship ready for him. Through his Holy Spirit - the Spirit of truth - He invites us, confronts us with himself and with ourselves, just as Jesus confronted the woman with herself and with her story, and thus prepares the way of truth for us.

4. Divine Service: The conversation culminates in the topic of worship, that is, in the service. Where does one pray properly and what is needed? The Samaritans' worship therefore seems to miss the mark, at least in part, because the right knowledge of the mark is missing. We could perhaps say it lacks a theologically correct foundation. Whoever does not stand on a firm foundation of faith, on God's Word in its fullness, cannot in the long run celebrate worship properly and thus not beneficially. But also the Jewish temple service, which has this quality according to Jesus, will from now on also no longer be "the real thing". The new quality shows itself in truth and spirit. As we have already seen, truth is fulfilled in sincerity. It is about being aware of one's situation as a human being with gifts and strengths, but above all weaknesses and shortcomings. It is about seeing God as the God of one's whole life and not only as a possible, personal concept of an individual way of life. It is about confessing one's guilt and wanting to meet Jesus Christ and his message openly, as Jesus is and not as I would like him to be or am used to. And then it is about the spirit, *pneuma* in Greek. This brings us back to breathing and movement, as we encountered in the prayer of St Augustine. It is about a dynamism against slackness, stagnation, inertia, against death - it is the spirit

that makes breathe and makes alive. This spirit is no longer bound to fixed places alone, and it is more than rigid correctness. But it is bound to Jesus Christ, his message and his word. The woman meets him, hears his words and is filled with this spirit. This sets her in motion. Action comes in here and she becomes an ambassador for the others in the village. (Incidentally, this is one of the few passages in John's Gospel that ends with a concrete, clear and positive outcome). The Spirit of truth and fulfilling worship of God is neither a fixed, rigid thing, nor an incomprehensible, esoteric, occult force, but God's turning to us. The Holy Spirit meets and fills us in the encounter with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in His word to us. Therefore, one can only stand permanently in faith if one follows Jesus' invitation to Word and Sacrament in worship. For us it is enough if we meet him openly like the woman at the well, everything else is then done by the Spirit of God. May this Spirit fill us here, so that we can go on happily and strengthened in everyday life and say: Did not our hearts burn within us?

Blessing: Blessing: The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.