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48 wo ihr Wurm nicht stirbt und das Feuer nicht verlöscht.

49 Denn jeder wird mit Feuer gesalzen werden.

50 Das Salz ist gut; wenn aber das Salz nicht mehr salzt, womit wird man's würzen? Habt Salz bei euch und habt Frieden untereinander!

Sisters and Brothers in Lynhurst !

It is the first time to stay in an American pulpit and preach to you. It is just a little bit of the situation when I preached the first time in the congregation where I got my practical education. I prepared all well, many times I changed the sentences- no computer only a typewriter, scissors and glue. The original pages are still at home. It was not a Sunday it was the Ascension Day in 1983.

The moment came and I climbed the stairs to pulpit - no way back possible. I stood there opened my mouth and said :

Liebe Gemeinde - Dear Congregation –and the first step was done.

I try it now: Dear Congregation of Lynhurst,

yesterday the first half part of my visit was arrived. 44 days I am staying with you, living with you, praying with you, singing with you , eating and drinking with you – I am feeling as a part of you. Thank you, that this happened in this good way. I am feeling just like being at home. So much friendly words, so much friendly hands and invitations. These words I must say to you again: Thank You so much.

But now listen again to the first part of our gospel from Mark

Anyone Who Is Not Against Us Is for Us

*“Teacher,“? said John, “we saw a man driving out demons in your name. We told him to stop, because he was not one of us“. “Do not stop him“ Jesus said. “No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me. **Anyone who is not against us is for us.** “What I’m about to tell you is true. Suppose someone gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to me. That one will certainly not go without a reward.“*

Well, what a nice situation ! There are people doing things without having the licence to do it. They are driving out demons in the name of the Lord. How can they do it ? They are not members of our group.

What they are doing is not allowed in the eyes of the real disciples. And so they try to stop them. Are they right ? Are the disciples allowed to do this ? O yes, the

disciples thought so, because the only person acting in the name of Jesus is Jesus himself and -of course- are the disciples. Other people are not allowed to do so. Jesus must say a word against this acting. So, Jesus, say something and forbid this doing.

But Jesus doesn't. He allows this, he forbids his own disciples to stop them. Jesus will not have a monopoly on healing people.

„Do not stop them“ he said . It is good, when they do this in my name. If they use my name for this miracle, they can not misuse my name in the next moment. They are on my/our side, if they know it or not. They are (a kind of) disciples, too.

Jesus may be glad about this unnamed disciples, the named disciples are not amused. They fear about their monopoly – their monopoly on Jesus. We are near to Him ! We are the ones who know what he it meaning ! We are the only and real disciples.

Nothing at all, because Jesus replies: **Anyone who is not against us is for us.** It means, who ever acts in the name of Jesus and does good things, he accompanies Jesus. He needs no licence to do it. Can you feel the disappointment of the disciples ?

Who acts in the name of Jesus ? In the gospel it is just clear- but is it also clear in our modern time ?

I am 6 weeks in Louisville and the most impressing to me is the great number of churches in this town. It may be possible to count them, but i gave up. In every Street are many churches and they all/the most will work in the name of Jesus. There are very small ones, there are very big ones, there is a mega Church. There must be roundabout 1000 Churches. And there is The Shepherds Guide, the Christians Choice of Yellow pages. 28 Pages of Churches, and so much more: Christian Cleaning, christian Plumbing and so on. All in the name of the Lord. There are congregations they are fighting to survive. Congregations are planning to leave their Church

Others churches have no problems, because the people coming in great numbers to them. Thousands come to every whorship and Biblestudy. And they collecting big money.

They have success with Jesus, but do they the right way? It may be asced so. Or are they on right way, **because** they have success with Jesus ?

Anyone who is not against us is for us. So Jesus said. Because the others were able to drive aout demons, they were also disciples of Jesus. So it must be joyfull to see how many people try to follow the steps of Jesus.

There is a big competition about the same people in this City. Who is allowed to drive demons out - that means today who is allowed to gather a lot of people.

Who are the real disciples of the Lord - and who are not ?

Jesu told them

“What I'm about to tell you is true. Suppose someone gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to me. That one will certainly not go without a reward.”

How this peolpe are acting, will show the difference. The way of helping is important and the reason of helping, too.

But the Gospel has a second part. It seems to be the harder part of the Gospel.

42 *“What if someone leads one of these little ones who believe in me to sin? If he does, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.*

43-44 *“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It would be better for you to enter God's kingdom with only one hand than to go into hell with two hands. In*

hell the fire never goes out. 45-46 “If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It would be better for you to enter God's kingdom with only one foot than to have

two feet and be thrown into hell. 47 “If your eye causes you to sin, poke it out. It would be better for you to enter God's kingdom with only one eye than to have

two eyes and be thrown into hell. 48 In hell, “ ‘The worms do not die. The fire is not put out.’ 49 Everyone will be salted with fire. 50 “Salt is good. But suppose

it loses its saltiness. How can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves. And be at peace with each other !

First I would not like to use this part of the Gospel. It is too hard and filled with so much violence against yourself. To be drowned, to cut off a hand or a leg, poke out an eye. I am glad that people did not do it- otherwise our mankind would be blind and harmed, or drowned.

I like to understand this as a picture: it is necessary to take decisions. You remember Pastor Bob's story about the successful man. He learnt to take the right decisions by doing wrong decisions. But he took decisions.

What means this picture for the life of a church ? Even for Church in US and Germany. I am sure, that we are forced to take decisions in the next years about church and how to follow the steps of the Lord. It may be course a lot of changing.

The interim Conference Minister of the Ohio conference, Jack Seville, joined three weeks ago the UCC Forum in Germany. He talked about a new way to deal with problem of draining people from special region (great plain): the Wider Parish Concept. Not every pastor had to do all in a parish, but they are trained to do special tasks in a lot of congregations. That forces decision and changes. Seville quotes a management consultant (Michael Hammer): "A brand of a good firm is the willing, to get rid of all, what have made them successful in the past, and start completely new."

(Das gilt etwa für das riesige Gebiet des Great Plain im mittleren Westen, wo immer weniger und immer ältere Menschen leben. Dürreperioden und schlechte wirtschaftliche Aussichten haben in Staaten wie Nord-Dakota ganze Landstriche, einst als fruchtbares Ackerland von Bedeutung, weitgehend entvölkert. Davon ist auch die Kirche betroffen. Unter der Moderation von Reverend Seville fand man Wege, damit umzugehen. Einer davon: Das Modell der erweiterten Gemeinde (Wider Parish Concept). Es sieht vor, dass in einer bestimmten Region spezialisierte Pfarrer ihren Dienst für jede Gemeinde anbieten, etwa für Jugendarbeit oder Kirchlichen Unterricht. Auf diese Weise kam im Sommer 2005 in York/Pennsylvania ein stadtweites Jugendprogramm zustande: 8.500 junge Leute renovierten Häuser und setzten sich für Sozialhilfeempfänger ein.

„Das Merkmal einer wirklich guten Firma ist der Wille, all das, was sie einmal erfolgreich gemacht hat, abzulegen und neu anzufangen“, zitierte Seville den Unternehmensberater Michael Hammer.)

Firms have the experience how difficult this way can be. Churches will get the experience, how difficult the way will be.

We are used to do things in this way, we love our wellknown ways, we love our rituals. But if this prevents the living or growing of church it may or must be changed.

The gospel will encourage us to change, where changing is necessary. But we are forced to use all of our wisdom /cleverness to find this points. The gospel can give us hinds, but it give us no receipts - not in the UCC neither in the German churches.

We cannot close our eyes, when we see people running to places where they get so easy receipts how to live their lifes. Be carefull with people which say „I am the way“ – and they are not the Lord. Perhaps we must say in an honest way, that we have **no** receipts for a perfect and right live. But we can say, that we are looking together to find a good way.

When I go back to germany in six weeks, I kow that we must take decisions in our congregation to deal with our problems. We must be encouraged to do it.

I know that you must take decisions, you must be encouraged, too.

Sisters and Brothers, the Gospel ends with this words:

50 “Salt is good. But suppose it loses its saltiness. How can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves. And be at peace with each other !

Salt cannot lose it’s saltiness, it can only be spread. Even the smallest part of salt has saltiness. So we must not be afraid to loose our saltines, when we have the connection to our Lord - even we are only small. He will be at our side, when we have to go difficult ways. And sometimes he will carry us, when the way is so hard. Be encouraged and full of hope:

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of ower, of love and of selfdiscipline. (2.Tim 1,7) Amen.

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Leading People to Sin

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