

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

## I.

They did not really expect the appearance of this woman. Sitting or reclining, the men who were with Jesus had made themselves comfortable in the house of Simon. Maybe, they were just talking about the events of the past few days, the entry into Jerusalem. Maybe, they were telling one another about the hope for a change of society and about God, who loves his children and thus comes close to them like a father does, to each and every child. Probably, they had already sensed that Jesus would be in danger if he kept sticking his neck out with his words and actions. That is how they kept each other company.

Then, something happens that no one of them would have expected: the appearance of this woman. Suddenly, she pops in. No one knows where she comes from and how she came in. A woman in a male-only club – almost impossible if one considers the conditions of that time. She turns towards Jesus without saying a word. Then, she takes a small jar, presumably made from precious alabaster and filled with nard oil. Nard is a medicinal plant from the Himalaya. Already in ancient times, it was exported to the Mediterranean region and used to produce oils and ointments. The woman breaks the jar and pours the precious anointing oil made from nard over Jesus. In doing so, she says nothing. Jesus remains silent as well. Without uttering a word, he lets it happen. Here already ends the appearance of the woman.

In fact, none of them had expected that before - although the disciples should have been prepared to experience such things when Jesus was present. Time and again, he did things nobody was expecting of him. Once, he and a leper – Simon from Bethany - sat around a table. Most people would certainly have avoided coming to close to Simon the Leper.

On another occasion, Jesus had stopped at a publican's house – a man hated by all others because of his profession. Or Jesus talked to a prostitute and even to people of other faiths. An incalculable man, that Jesus; and this may be one of the reasons why he is regarded with suspicion and hatred by the powerful of the world. Who knows where such an unpredictable behaviour will lead to? Where would it take us if the religious, political and social boundaries and rules of decency were no longer important? That would inevitably endanger the entire society!

## II

In fact, that is how we human beings often react when something cannot be calculated; that makes us afraid; we better get rid of it than deal with it. Or we try to calculate the incalculable – in order to get a grip on it.

After we in Germany had received many refugees in 2015, a debate about a so-called upper limit has sparked, that is, how many refugees we can receive each year. Does this not represent the very attempt to calculate the incalculable? Once and for all getting a grip on the incalculable distress forcing people to leave their homeland? As if the right to asylum and the distress of a human being can be expressed by a calculable measuring unit?

However, that does not work - at least not without the loss of humanity. It will not solve any aspect of the actual worldwide problem if we want to meet the distress of the refugees with purely rational numbers. This crisis is a crisis of humanity that we can only solve together, as the community of the people of Europe and ultimately as the global community. Of course we do need general provisions; of course the responsible politicians do have to assess the possible burdens to be shouldered and insist on compliance with law and order. But eventually, the humanity we are called to is beyond any calculability. The distress of others remains a challenge, a thorn in the flesh. We cannot just seal ourselves off from this distress.

### III.

As soon as the delicious scent of nard oil has filled the air with its tantalising freshness, as soon as the friends of Jesus are sure which precious substance was wasted by the woman, the disciples heap accusations upon the woman: How can one be so lavish with an expensive perfume? The men estimate the value of the oil to be 300 dinars (that corresponds to the approximate annual income of a worker) – what good deeds could have been done by means of this amount? In fact, what a useful support can be provided by spending 15.000 euros (about 143.000 kronor)?

The disciples lose sight of the phenomenon that is and remains incalculable:

- the love given to them by Jesus,
- the mercy practised towards man by God,
- the dedication of the woman who does not want to and cannot be measured by figures.

Those who are prepared to give away give abundantly.

However, Jesus does not only give away something. He is on the way to sacrifice himself. That may have been the reason why he was so receptive to the very personal, tender and lavish attention he experienced by the woman. A service of sacrifice devoid of any cost-benefit consideration, devoid of any calculation process. He realises that by anointing him, the woman has understood how God acts towards us – spontaneous, generous and without asking what it may cost, just like Jesus lived the mercy of God without asking what it might cost. Finally, it cost him his life. The woman pours out a small bottle of oil - just like God as he gave away to us the most precious thing, his son Jesus Christ.

#### IV.

They did not expect the appearance of this woman. However, they also did not expect that this ointment would have a particular meaning. By this ointment, Jesus's death on the cross has already been interpreted: what comes now lies beyond any calculability. The cross and the resurrection of Jesus cannot be calculated according to the measurement systems of this world. Those who have only learned to follow the concept of power and those who are only used to judge their fellow men according to expediency will not grasp Jesus's self-offering and will not understand what God, who identifies himself with Christ on the cross, is like.

Jesus's cross and resurrection offer a new way of understanding life. Those believing in the resurrected Christ exclude any thought of calculation from human life and confer a steadfast dignity to it that must not be measured or put in figures. That goes for each human being, at all times.

In Jesus Christ, calculation ceases; and life becomes something completely different! God does not calculate. God considers the person; and loves. He looks at you. He looks at me. And he loves.

#### V.

This year, we celebrate an anniversary of the Reformation. We remember that Martin Luther realised the love of God for himself anew and then brought it up freshly and powerfully. "How do I get a merciful God?" This was an important question to him. Nowadays, his answer is more significant than most people believe: I am accepted by God, not because of my own efforts, but because of the fact that God accepts me. I do not have to put myself center-stage again and again, I am accepted, and therefore, I can freely shape my life. For myself and in taking responsibility for others.

500 years after the Reformation, this message is highly topical. In times and societies calculating all things by asking for their usefulness and the profit they generate we as Christians require the reference to and the trust in the liberty of an incalculable life. At a time when political action is directed to preferably making "the best deal" for the own country, we need a political culture that does not reduce all things to calculating its own benefit, but strives afresh for dignity, liberty and solidarity.

If we merely look upon Europe from the perspective of economic usefulness, Europe will break apart. Europe is more than that, it is a community of peace and value. *This* is what we have to fill with life. In that respect, I am truly sure that we as churches in Europe have to fulfil a particular mission. As churches we do stand up for a message beyond any commercialisation and calculation of the whole life.

#### VI.

They did not expect the appearance of this woman. The anointing oil about to be poured out. But do we calculate it? Do we have a sense for the unbelievable love God has given us? That he uses to anoint us? Or do we start to calculate once again?

Depending on the market situation, the plain material value of a human body amounts to about 10 euros (95 kronor). In contrast, the devotion of God is incalculably valuable.

We live somewhere in between. We often do have to calculate in some way, or else we would not find our way in this world; we have to evaluate and decide on the basis of figures – and then, we consider what profit and loss looks like. Yet, we also know the other side as well. We feel the power of love that resists any calculation. It is this power that makes us humane, considerate and solidary, passionate and inspiring. Just the way Jesus lived.

The oil was poured over him. Thus, it is also poured over us. As a sign of God's infinite love whenever he looks at us and our lives. We can only believe in it devotedly. Just the way Jesus did.

*“And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”*

*Amen.*