

## Bulletin No. 51 – April 2020



### All church services and meetings online

Due to Corona crisis, all of our meetings are now online, e.g. the Sunday service on Sundays at 10:30. Our regular activities are listed here:

<https://www.ibc-bielefeld.org/activities/>

To fix potential technical issues, the online room for services will be opened 30 minutes earlier. For updates, you may join the Facebook group

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ibcbielefeld>

which is a private initiative of current and former IBC friends.

**Bernd Winkelsträter**

### Into silence

Easter 2020 will be different from any other Easter we have known before.

As I was walking the dog yesterday the stillness and solitude along the way felt heavy. Fear has moved into more or less every home.

I'm not going to cite all the Bible verses that you can hear from many preachers around the world, trying to encourage people who are home alone. Don't get me wrong, they are all valid and comforting,...but let's focus on the silence for a moment.

The silence that followed after the stone was rolled up to shut a grave. Here lay someone who claimed to be the light of the world; someone who confronted the religious elite of his time and spoke to the heart of every man, woman and child the words of eternal life.

And fear and sorrow overcame all who had followed him; they hid themselves away in their houses, mourning and doubting what Jesus, their teacher and friend had taught them.

But this is not the end of the story, as we all know. On the third day Mary found that the stone had been rolled away. The grave was empty and the burial cloths were lying there, but the face cloth was folded up in a place by itself (John 20: 6-7).

Now in Jesus time people had a certain culture of dining together. It would go on for hours and at the end of the meal the napkin would be left on the table all crumpled up. But if you left the table and had the intention of coming back to resume your meal, you would fold up your napkin and leave it there to be seen.

Jesus had promised his disciples in John 14 that he would go to the Father and prepare a place for them and that he would come back to take them there also, and this promise extends to all who believe in him.

Maybe on Easter morning 2020 people will not gather in churches, maybe the streets and public places will still be empty, but the living word of God breaks the silence with hope and reassurance: Take heart, my work on the cross is finished and I have become the bridge to the Father. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me." (John14:1) May this time of solitude and silence be an opportunity to find new hope and strength in the reason why we celebrate Easter.

**Elke Mottershead**

### What benefits the soul?

A German pastor recently told us that his first parish had a very parsimonious, post-war church building.

More and more people in the church wanted to change at least the inside of it. Following some discussion, they reached a consensus: first of all, paraments for the altar and pulpit should be ordered. The first offers showed that such liturgical textiles were not cheap, particularly if you were looking for good quality.

This caused immediate resistance: how can one spend so much money on paraments? Such money should rather be given to the homeless or the hungry in the world. They were also thinking of their mission partners in Namibia. Soon the church was split in supporters and their opponents. The paraments were purchased yet complaining didn't stop for a while. Should one spend money for something aesthetically beautiful and soul-comforting? Or does this amount to sinful squandering? In view of the need that surrounds us directly and worldwide is there an option to use church funds for anything other than addressing such needs?

In other words: what is more important? Caring for people or serving the Lord?

This kind of discussion is all but new. We can see this in the report, Mark provides us with when he writes about the woman that comes to see Jesus in Bethany. She pours precious nard (oil) on his head to show him her reverence. Yet this anointment shows more: namely that the woman knew well, whom she was anointing: The Messiah. The anointing of Jesus is an expression of faith, of worship and of submission. Nothing is too expensive to this woman to express her deepest innermost faith.

However, the disciples take offense: one should have sold the expensive oil and should have given any revenue to the poor. And this is how Christians argue to this very day: all money and our entire efforts have to be to the benefit of those in need. Everything has to concentrate on that mission.

Jesus sees this completely different. He does not pit both aspects against each other. For Jesus, care for people and worshiping God, represent two sides of the coin. Helping the needy is a long-lasting duty for all Christians. What is needed above this, is strengthening and reassurance of faith. This way, faith will provide endurance to act in the long run and

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out of faith itself. Faith can only be supported, literally reinforced and affirmed, if it addresses all human senses. Mere demand in itself: “you must, you should” - does not provide the long wind of faith.

This kind of endurance is created above all, when we see, feel and taste, how friendly our God is and how soothing our faith.

Particularly during these weeks now, I can sense, how important those aspects are: engaging for those in need and the soothing of the soul by worshiping our Lord.

Here in Bielefeld I can see a lot of offers available for people who are suffering from the current corona pandemic and all the everyday hurdles it causes. At the same time, there is an equal amount of opportunity for prayer, for virtual fellowship with church bells ringing and to digitally gather for services. How good that even in the days of corona, we do not think in false alternatives.

**Stefan Prystawik**

### The tomb is empty

Easter, also called Resurrection Sunday, is a festival and a public holiday in many countries. In Germany, children love to dye Easter eggs. Then, a mythical Easter Bunny will hide eggs in the garden for children to find.

Some believe that the eggs and bunnies symbolize fertility, new beginnings and even rebirth. Some believe that early Christians stained eggs red in memory of the blood of Christ that was shed at his crucifixion, others believe that the Easter egg is a symbol of the empty tomb.

"The tomb was empty! They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" That was the message brought to Peter and John by some women.

In the district of Caesarea Philippi, Peter was the first disciple who declared that Jesus is the Messiah. He said, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." After that Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

When they came together in Galilee, Jesus predicted his death a second time. On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus took the twelve disciples aside and said to them a third time. There is no doubt that Peter and John heard these predictions. But they didn't take his words to heart, because they didn't understand why it must take place to the Messiah.

Like other Jews, the disciples had the hope that the Messiah, a divine human King sent from God, would lead the nation of Israel to defeat the Roman Empire. He will release them from the pains and sufferings brought by the Romans. He will establish a new Kingdom for God's chosen people. They will enjoy peace and prosperity under his reign.

Neither the disciples nor the women were prepared for the resurrection of Jesus. On the contrary, the chief priests and the Pharisees had done something to prevent the resurrection of Jesus from happening. They went to Pilate and asked for the tomb to be made secure until the third

day. They were afraid that his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead.

In John 20, Thomas could not believe that Jesus had resurrected from the dead. Later Jesus appeared and told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

This story may leave an impression that simply believing the Gospel will cast out doubts and solve all the problems. Peter was an eyewitness of the majesty and honor of Lord Jesus on the sacred mountain. However, he points out that we must understand the prophetic messages from the Scriptures as something completely reliable.

That is exactly the way Jesus taught the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He rebuked them for their slowness to believe the prophetic messages. And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, Jesus explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself, so that they may understand that the Messiah has to suffer and then enter his glory.

That is exactly the way Jesus taught the Eleven in Jerusalem. Though they saw the resurrected Jesus and touched him, they must understand that everything must be fulfilled that is written about Jesus in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.

Let us listen again to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path.... But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

I pray that the Lord may open our minds to understand the Scriptures, as it is necessary that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

**Xianghui Zhang**

### Submissions to your Bulletin

The Monthly Bulletin of IBC Bielefeld is a platform aiming to create more formal church communications through writings. Submissions on original articles in the understanding of the Bible and Christian life including original book reviews and studies on specific biblical topics are welcome. The following topics are within the scope of the Bulletin.

- (1) News and events of the church;
- (2) Apologetics and Theology;
- (3) Personal studies on attributes of God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, church history and emerging issues;
- (4) Creation versus Evolution;
- (5) Personal testimonies;
- (6) Answers to frequently asked Bible questions;
- (7) Letters to the IBCB church from former members.

Please send your articles to:

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