



**... euret wegen**  
*... because of you*

So spricht GOTT, eure Erlösung, heilig in Israel:  
Um euretwillen habe ich nach Babel geschickt:  
ich werde alle Riegel herunterreißen,  
und die Menschen Chaldäas jubeln auf ihren Schiffen.

Jesaja 43,14

*Sermon by Bishop Christian Alsted at the opening of  
the 9th meeting of the Germany Central Conference  
of the United Methodist Church*

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## For your sake – euretwegen

The Lord your redeemer,  
the holy one of Israel, says,

**For your sake, I have sent an army<sup>[a]</sup> to Babylon,  
and brought down all the bars,  
turning the Chaldeans' singing into a lament.<sup>[b]</sup>**

<sup>15</sup> I am the Lord, your holy one,  
Israel's creator, your king!

<sup>16</sup> The Lord says—who makes a way in the sea  
and a path in the mighty waters,

<sup>17</sup> who brings out chariot and horse,  
army and battalion;  
they will lie down together and will not rise;  
they will be extinguished, extinguished like a wick.

<sup>18</sup> Don't remember the prior things;  
don't ponder ancient history.

<sup>19</sup> Look! I'm doing a new thing;  
now it sprouts up; don't you recognize it?

I'm making a way in the desert,  
paths<sup>[c]</sup> in the wilderness.

Isaiah 43: 14–19 Common English Bible

Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been raised. On the Sabbath he went to the synagogue as he normally did and stood up to read. <sup>17</sup> The synagogue assistant gave him the scroll from the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

<sup>18</sup> *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me.*

*He has sent me to preach good news to the poor,  
to proclaim release to the prisoners  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to liberate the oppressed,*

<sup>19</sup> *and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.<sup>[e]</sup>*

<sup>20</sup> He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the synagogue assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the synagogue was fixed on him. <sup>21</sup> He began to explain to them, "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled just as you heard it."

Luke 4:16–21 Common English Bible

In an interview about his work, which has taken him to almost all the war zones in the world, photographer and journalist Jan Grarup tells the story of a young girl in Somalia, she had seen terrible things done to her family by partisan soldiers. And he says: This

young girl had a movie running in her mind, a movie no child, in fact no human being should ever have to watch, nevertheless, it runs every day, it won't be erased, it won't go away.

Millions of people in this world have movies like that playing in their minds, in Ukraine I have met and talked to a few of them.

It is hard to comprehend the amount of pain human beings inflict on each other. There is an evil out there, and during times of extreme violence and war that evil makes people do horrific things - it causes pain, terror, chaos and destruction. It's not new. Read the Old Testament - there is a blood trail of violence and war. At times caused by the people of God, at times by their enemies.

Our text from Isaiah speaks right into this to a people abducted and taken into exile by an enemy nation - decades of alienation and suffering in a hostile foreign country, decades of praying in despair, pain and longing for freedom. For your sake, euretwegen, I am setting things in motion. For your sake, I will change the situation. This is hope, this is the promise of a new exodus - a new future.

The 21st century Church in Europe appears to become weaker year by year, crisis has become the order of the day. In our darkest hours, we may ask: Have we been deserted? Has God turned his back on us? We do all the right things, but we don't see the results. Many pastors through decades of ministry have only seen decline. Are we experiencing the Babylonian exile of the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

That may be, nevertheless, Isaiah's message is clear, don't get caught up in the past - don't dwell in the glory days, when Europe was the center of Christianity - look I am doing a new thing - look it is sprouting up. And when God is doing a new thing, it may come out in fresh surprising ways and it is likely to sprout up in unexpected places.

There are of course those who will tell us nothing is wrong, everything will be alright, no need to repent, no one need to change our lifestyle.

We have strategies to deal with the challenges of our time. We blame it on consumerism and secularism. We blame it on the entertainment industry and social media. We blame it on the migrants, they undermine our society, with their culture and their religion, and we want them out. Another approach is silence to cope with the unpleasant situation. If we don't talk about it, it doesn't exist!

Eugenia lives with her husband Valeri in an apartment building in Kyiv, a few months ago one of the neighboring apartments building was totally destroyed by a drone. Genia says, "when my spiritual life is good and strong, I have no fear, but when my spiritual is weak I cannot sleep from fear."

Eugenia volunteers as a lay army chaplain, she goes to with a team of dentists to field hospitals just behind the frontline, she knows fear, she has heard all the terrible stories, and in the midst of the war she offers comfort and spiritual support to wounded soldiers.

Deep down, we know that the priorities in our Christian life should be different. We know, that a closer and more honest relationship with Jesus - more frequent visits to fellowships where our faith is nurtured and strengthened - a greater commitment to those who suffer and carry heavy burdens - might very well be the new thing God desires to do.

We know that the climate crisis, the poverty crisis and all the wars are about to tear us apart. The world is suffering and, as always, it is the poorest who suffer the most. We cannot remain indifferent and silent in the face of the dramatic world situation we find ourselves in. We have to ask as Christians and as churches what shall we teach, how shall we teach and what should we do.....?

The false prophets have always been popular, while the true prophets have struggled with their image. Perhaps more than ever, we need to listen to the true prophets, those who say: It's time to repent and change our ways!

But what will it even matter - we are up against overwhelmingly strong forces.....

*George Friedrich Handel, had troubles with his eyesight, he was in deep debt and depressed as a result, when began composing on Saturday 22 August 1741, (during the Methodist revival) Despite the circumstances Händel wrote his chorale at an amazing speed of only 23 days. Today the chorale is known as Händels Messiah - in my country many people cannot imagine Christmas without it.*

*Handel later credited the completion of his work to one ingredient: Joy. He was quoted saying that while he was composing, he felt as if his heart would burst with joy at what he was hearing in his mind. Handel continued with joy despite his challenging circumstances.*

Isaiah's words point to the future to the new thing God is about to do - know this happening for your sake, euretwegen. The message points towards the future, you might say the focal point is in the future, on what is to come - it points towards him, who stood up in the synagogue in Nazareth - and read, and the words he read happened to be from the prophet Isaiah as well.

*God's Spirit is on me;  
he's chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor,  
Sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and  
recovery of sight to the blind,  
To set the burdened and battered free,  
to announce, "This is God's time to shine!" This is when God will make a new thing,  
this is the year of the Lords good favor, the year of justice, the year of regeneration.  
He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the  
place was on him, intent. Then he started in, "You've just heard Scripture make history.  
This just came true, right here today in this place.*

What you just heard, is now coming into being, it is happening before your very eyes. The great Methodist missionary E Stanley Jones puts this is the right perspective by saying:

"The first Christians didn't say: Look what the world has come to. They said: Look what has come into the world." This is not optimism or positive thinking. This hope is rooted in reality, the triune God became flesh and blood in Jesus Christ. Gods great vision for the world is coming true before our very eyes. It is for your sake, euretwegen – God is doing far beyond what we are able to, acting beyond our imagination

A few days ago I took a look at my baptism certificate – it is an important more than 60 years old document – the certificate tells a story – a story that goes far beyond where I was born or who my parents were – the important story is the story behind the certificate – it points to the past and to the future.

And in the present it says December 17<sup>th</sup> 1961 you were baptized, and it was just for you – it was made possible in the past when Jesus Christ became flesh and blood, lived, taught, healed and loved, was crucified, died, was buried and on the third day rose from the dead. It was made possible for your sake – euretwegen – for you and for all.

And the certificate points to the future – to a life that has been given the best possible start with Gods grace at work in baptism and to a life that will unfold, without us knowing what it will entail. Only knowing, that no matter what, nothing can separate us from God's love in Jesus Christ. It was made possible, for me, for you, for all who wants to believe and receive. The grace given to me from the very beginning, the grace conveyed to me in my baptism, is still at work in my life today and will be into eternity. What is ahead of us? – we have no way of knowing

I was asked by a friend in the US in January 2020, he said, these news about this new virus, what is your take on that in Europe? – my response was, well our health authorities say that it's quite harmless, much like the flu, and it is not even likely to get

to our part of the world. I had absolutely no idea – I couldn't even imagine that the world would more or less close down for the next two years.

We know nothing about the future – we may be entering the beginning of the apocalypse or we may be entering the beginning of the golden age of Christianity – we don't know. The one thing we do know is that no matter what, our calling remains the same: To do no harm, to do good, to share Christ's love, to make disciples and the world will be transformed.

And this is what we are going to do - may it be so....

Amen

