

**18th Sunday after trinity, 29-09-2013 service of the ACK
Nuremberg on the occasion of the award of the international
prize for human rights 2013 to Mrs Kasha Jacqueline N A B A G
E S E R A at St. Martha's church 9.30; sermon given by Prof. Dr.
Peter D a b r o c k (Erlangen)**

Biblical text for the sermon: 1.John 4,18-21

**Grace be with you and peace from God, our Father and our Lord,
savior and brother Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Dear congregation,

The biblical text for this Sunday is taken from the first epistle of St. John Chapter four. It will be interpreted in all protestant churches, not only here. Perhaps it is coincidental that precisely this text is handed to us today, is to be handled by us today.

In the first epistle of St. John we read: **“In love there is no room for fear; indeed perfect love banishes fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and anyone who is afraid has not attained to love in its perfection. We love because he loved us first. But if someone says “I love God” while at the same time hating his fellow-Christian, he is a liar. If he does not love a fellow-Christian, whom he has seen, he is incapable of loving God whom he has not seen. We have this command from Christ: whoever loves God must love his fellow-Christian, too.”** (Rev. Eng. Bible Oxford/Cambridge 1990)

Dear congregation,

“everything could be so simple. But it isn't.” This is the refrain of a protest song which Herbert Groenemeyer and the Fantastic Four performed at a concert framing the G8 summit at Heiligendamm. “Everything could be so simple, but it isn't “ We know enough of both: one knows, of course, how little would be necessary to improve at least some things. But: again and again everything is so complicated –

and again and again when we think it will improve because it could be so simple, then somebody gets up, perhaps our own baser instincts speaking: “But, but have you thought of this and considered that point?” Everything could be so simple, but it isn't, instead it's much more complicated.

When I now let today's text influence me, I feel similarly. Its message is really quite clear and simple: “faith without love – doesn't work !” Faith proves itself in love – or it isn't faith. “Whoever claims anything else, is a liar. And that's that! –It is so simple! Everything could be so simple, but it isn't. Who of us could then call himself a believer? Everyone of us does know enough people whom he doesn't love. According to the logic of this text we then apparently lack faith. Are we therefore all unbelievers? But what then gives us the strength to survive in this complicated life, the strength to resist manifest injustice? Everything could be so simple, but it isn't.

And yet, the biblical text is so unmistakably clear and simple: “if someone says “I love God” while at the same time hating his fellow Christian, he is a liar”. Who of us assembled today in this interdenominational service on the occasion of the award to Mrs. Kasha Jacqueline Nabagesera, must not immediately think of her situation, when we hear: “if someone says: “I love God” while hating his fellow human being, he is a liar”?

For us here – and I believe, I speak for everyone – it is almost unimaginable, why you are threatened with death, always on flight, not able to enjoy leisure time in your home country, having lost your friend and fellow campaigner David Kato by brutal murder, even being persecuted by the “so-called” law. Why? because you, because your friends are homosexual, because they live, what they are. This is so absurd for me, that I wouldn't believe it if it hadn't come close, - too close to me through the media and been quite shocked by reports on you tube. It is indeed bad to know that especially Christian preachers foment this hatred. I in any case cannot call that “Christian”. No, this doesn't happen here: and I really mean it, when I say: “Thank God, it

doesn't". It is a great and important sign, that the city of Nuremberg is giving with the award of this human rights prize: **THIS MUST NOT HAPPEN !**

What's going on there, is – in another way – as evil as the mindless inhumanities were, which once raged in this very place (Nuremberg) and then were punished in just the same place. Nuremberg stands for both (inhumanity as well as punishment). There is no reason for us to lean back – self-satisfied as the Pharisees in the gospel – and to groan: "Ah, the others!" There is, of course, no state persecution of gay and lesbian people here in our country as there is in Uganda and in Russia and many other states – about 80 worldwide. But the history of Christianity towards gay, lesbian, bi- and transsexuals, transgender, intersexual is not at all a history of glory. On the contrary it is a horrifying history of blood and death – and it is a history of scandals and crimes of Christendom, which have showed, that often Christians have not practiced what they preached. But the self-critical consideration of how church and believers dealt and deal with non-heterosexual people isn't exhausted in looking at some colorful images of morals in the past. In France millions, primarily Christians, demonstrate against the so-called "homo-marriage" – a contemptuous expression! The Anglican church is menaced by a church split over the ordination of homosexual priests and even more so bishops. And the actual discussion about family concerns in the EKD is at bottom determined by the question whether or not non-heterosexual partnerships shall merit similar or equal recognition as married couples. Why, why on earth is that so?

Let us once more look back to our biblical text! It starts with a remarkable, I would even say, life-proved observation: " **In love there is no room for fear.**" That means, if we turn it round : " Where there is fear , there love and confidence and acceptance cannot grow. Fear sows hatred or at least indifference , which then doesn't defy hatred.

So for me there is an explanation, why non-heterosexual people are dealt with in an unfriendly and even hostile manner: to observe that others live in another way respectful

and happy with one another, many people apparently experience as a radical questioning of their own lifestyle. They fantasize wild stuff about the others as "perverts" which says more about their own fantasies than about other people. They feel shaken in their own , perhaps laboriously constructed world. If then in addition difficult economic and political conditions exist, then an explosive mixture develops, deadly for the scape-goat.

This will not happen again here, thank God, as I have said already. But that fear towards a non-heterosexual lifestyle is still deeply rooted amongst us, too. Yesterday I took part in a well attended discussion on the controversial family paper of the EKD. There, too, besides encouraging initiatives I found much fear, faint heartedness, discouragement. Because more and more non-heterosexual people strive for more of the rights and duties of a permanent partnership, one sees one's own life model downgraded. Why aren't people glad that marriage and family are so attractive that many non-heterosexuals want to live that way? Why don't we enjoy the variety of life possibilities? Against those fears and those anxieties we do have antidotes from the midst of the gospel; antidotes from all three traditions of the New Testament: from the gospels, from St. Paul's and from St. John's writings: Wasn't it Jesus, of whom all the gospels tell us, that he didn't accept any social borders, that he even met the so-called outcasts, was even looking out for them? He didn't do so as a social romanticist, but because he wanted to show: in a community living in solidarity with those whom society despises the width and depth of God's love is revealed.

And wasn't it St. Paul who reminded us that in the end neither gender nor status nor nationality are important for the coexistence of Christians.? "Here is neither Jew nor Greek, here is neither slave nor free, here is neither man nor woman because you are all together one in Christ Jesus". (Gal. 3,28)- St. Paul doesn't hereby condone a dissolute life: "In Christ they shall be bound together. And that means for all: across gender, job and origin: " love, joy, peace, patience, friendliness, kindness, faithfulness,

gentleness.” (Gal 5,22). So St. Paul writes a few lines later. This is not an effeminate spirit of the times speaking, but the spirit of love.

And what didn't we just hear from the first epistle of St. John: “**Let us love one another, for he loved us first!**” **STOP!** Don't read over this sentence too quickly: it is the key to the good news: “Let us love each other, for he loved us first!” That is how it works: it's not simply and primarily about morals, commandments or law, no: everything is founded in God's gracious readiness to enter into a loving relation with the totally contrary, with man as he/she is, – so open was and is God, that he has admitted us. Because I may trust this God, who gives me room for living, I may again and again dare to give room for living to others. Because he again and again starts anew with us, we may dare to start anew with others, with ourselves.

“Because he loved us first!” “**He, who doesn't love, doesn't believe**” it says at the beginning of our text. Now we understand better: even if experiencing ourselves as not loving, even if experiencing ourselves as nonbelievers, we may know that we are being carried, we may make a new start, we may gain a new perspective, we need not be guided by the fear within us. Two encouraging examples: Kasha Jacqueline Nabagesera remains in the country, which she loves in spite of experiencing so much hatred and goes on fighting courageously against hatred and injustice. But she doesn't answer violence with violence, but she fights with the word – non vi, sed verbo. May God protect her!

The second example: pope Francesco recently gave a remarkable interview and taught us, how one can get a new perspective: “there must not be any spiritual interference whatsoever into personal life. Once somebody provoked me by asking if I approved of homosexuality. I answered by asking him another question: “Tell me, when God looks upon a homosexual person, does he look upon this person with love or does he condemn her and reject her?” We always have to look at the person. We hereby enter the mystery of the person. God accompanies people through life and we have to accompany them, respecting their situation. We have

to accompany them with mercy.” So speaks the pope! Encouraging against discouragement! Let us resist unmerciful fear! Let us accept people as they are – as long as they don't hurt others. Let us accept that God accepts them. Let us accept them finally as members of full value in society and church – with all rights and duties!

“**Fear is not in love, but perfect love casts out fear.**” “It could be so simple, but it isn't!” So we started off. With the message of fearless love we can exclaim instead: “Everything could be so complicated, but it needn't be!”

And the peace of God, which is higher than all reason, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.