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Gottesdienstangebote aus dem ELM

Predigt zum 2. Sonntag im Advent 6. Dezember 2015

Predigttext: Jakobus 5, 7-8

Die Predigt wurde von **Francis Abdelmassieh** verfasst, der aus Ägypten stammt, dort aufwuchs und am evangelischen Seminar in Kairo seine theologische Ausbildung erhielt.

Nach seiner Ordination in 2001 arbeitete er als Pastor der Evangelisch-Presbyterianischen Kirche in Mallawi, einem Ort circa 300 km südlich von Kairo.

Sein Wunsch weiter zu studieren und den akademischen Grad eines „Master in Intercultural Theology“ zu erwerben, brachten ihn und seine Familie im Jahr 2013 nach Hermannsburg an die Fachhochschule für Interkulturelle Theologie. Nach seinem erfolgreichen Abschluss hat er eine befristete Berufung in der Bremischen Evangelischen Kirche für die Arbeit mit Arabisch sprechenden Flüchtlingen angetreten.

Seine Erlebnisse in Ägypten sind geprägt von einem friedlichen Zusammenleben der Religionen bis zu den Anfängen des Arabischen Frühlings. Anstelle der erhofften Freiheit brach eine Zeit der Verfolgung, der Zerstörung von Kirchen und der Diskriminierung für die ägyptischen Christinnen und Christen an.

Die Predigt möchte deutlich machen, dass Gewalt und Hass keine Antwort auf gesellschaftliche Probleme sein können. Die Hoffnung als eine Gabe Gottes gibt den Kirchen die Kraft, selbst in Bedrängnis am Glauben festzuhalten.

Die deutsche Übertragung der Predigt finden Sie auf unserer Webseite:

https://www.elm-mission.net/fileadmin/uploads/G_Spenden/Kollekten/2015/15-12-06_predigt.doc

oder auf der Seite www.kollekten.elm-mission.net

Spendenkonto

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Sermon

1. The River Nile

Imagine you sit next to the river Nile, you can hear and see the water, the sunset, the boats, and on the east side you can see the mountains and you can smell the cool air after a hot day. To watch the sunset and enjoy the view of the Nile and to take a wonderful deep breath gives you the feeling that you are alive.

As an Egyptian I would like to describe the River Nile as the most important feature of my country.¹ This picture brings comfort and happiness to me every time I remember it.

The river Nile in Egypt brings the goodness and the life into the midst of the desert. This river is very essential for the crops, the animals, and for the people as well. We do not rely on rain but solely on the water of the Nile, which is used for irrigation since centuries. Water is a very precious commodity and it is wisely used in Egypt.²

Actually the water brings life and continuation to the human existence. Life without water is impossible, it is like a desert. The River Nile in Egypt gives hope and a future.

Spiritually, the river and also the rain refer to God who is the fountain of living water. He gives comfort and encouragement for the difficult journey through the wilderness of life. The sweet, fresh water of the rain and of the river brings life, joy and hope for the good harvest.

There is a deep longing in our hearts, a desire to live in peace and harmony. For me the River Nile is like a life line, a symbol of steadiness and peace.

2. Be patient

When we turn to our scripture reading, I am immediately reminded that all is not well – neither in my country nor in the Egyptian society. Let's listen carefully.

Reading from James 5, 7-8³

⁷ *Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.*

⁸ *You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.*

¹ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/eg.html>; letzter Zugriff am 16.10.2015.

² <http://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article138312734/Der-endlose-Krieg-um-das-Wasser-des-Nils.html>; letzter Zugriff am 16.10.2015.

³ Holy Bible, New International Version; 1984 by International Bible Society.

The text was not written for the time of Advent, but depicts a different situation. As a reformed pastor from Egypt I am not very familiar with the celebration of Advent in Germany and the countdown till Christmas:

In Egypt we don't have the candles, cookies and hot punch atmosphere. However I can see a connection between the call to be patient till the coming of Jesus Christ.

James threatens the rich for their misbehavior because they treat their workers with contempt. The Lord is coming and he will sort them out. On the other hand the brothers and sisters are reminded not to take revenge, but to show patience.

3. The Arab Spring

The wind of change started in December 2010 when protesters first stood up against the rulers and their parties in Tunisia. Like a bushfire the sparks sprang over to different countries in the Arab world and Egypt men and women were immediately involved. The then president Mubarak was thrown out of office and democratic elections were prepared. Peace seemed so close, but did not materialize. Freedom did not come and five years later the Churches and their members suffer under persecution as a minority group. Out of a population of 88 million inhabitants 79 million are Moslems and only 9 million are Christians.⁴

Today I can describe the situation in Egypt like that:

Most of the locals are exploited and live in poverty; the rulers refuse them their human rights. Persecution of minorities, a disdain for women and children are the order of the day.

Christians in Egypt face a lot of challenges. In many places the routes to the Churches are not safe and worshippers inside the churches aren't safe either. Some people thank God after arriving home safely. There are different kinds of persecutions in schools, in public services and in governmental jobs. The last four years Christians in Egypt faced more problems such as kidnapping, stealing and destruction of their business.

4. The churches are growing

On the other hand churches grow in membership and become more active in ministry and praying to God. Christians have faith and hope that brings patience and tolerance towards others. They believe that God is full of compassion unto them and will come soon to save and deliver them. He will come soon and take them to the better place in heaven, where there is no pain, no tears, and no suffering. Death, and all its terrors, will not frighten a believer from loving Christ but to remain faithful to God and love others. The perfect love, the fullness of love, which a believer has received, casts out fear and removes all slavish fears.

⁴ siehe Freedom of religion - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/egypt>; letzter Zugriff 16.10.2015.

Waters of the river can sometimes be devastating when the Nile floods come and destroy the houses of the people in the south of Egypt. True, some troubles and suffering come like the flood of the Nile and quench this love. But the Christians in Egypt always say no waters could quench Christ's love in us, nor any floods drown it; Christ waded through the greatest difficulties, even the suffering of the cross.

Advent is a time of preparation and soul searching. It can be also a time of pain and suffering. To use a powerful picture can make this point very clear.
Only the squeezing of the fruit brings forth delicious juice.

Christians in Egypt are suffering because of their faith, but they are waiting to celebrate Christmas and they rejoice in the coming of Christ as their Lord and Saviour. The living water, the word of God enables Christians in Egypt to survive.

Waiting in hope results in patience and love. We love because God first loved us. Love is everlasting and love never fails. In Egypt we have a wonderful song which goes like this:

"I am coming propped up on your promise
and my eyes look to glory.
Confident in you and in the power of divine love which you sincerely
promise.
When you are along inside my life, my fear escapes and my cheer-
ing arises.
Praise God who keeps me safe in his lap.

Truly, o my God, You are my Lord.
Truly, o God, I trust in your appointments and promises.

If the wind is strong, I am sure that you, God can stop it.
If the iron has entered my soul, the Lord can liberate me.
If I see my end with my own eyes and have no power to talk,
You, o God, will save me and stretch your hands out when I trust in
you.

Whatever temptations hurt, touches of your compassion give com-
fort.
You support my patience and I rejoice because you help me in all
matters.
The time of suffering is limited, even if the time of grief and night
prevails
I look for the dawn of a new day when all your promises and ap-
pointments come true.

The time of the hardship is limited even if it looks as if the dark and
sadness reigns. I am trusting in God's love that He will come soon
and He is never late."

Patience and love are more powerful than hate and evil. You can
discover in the book of James that they can be experienced and
practiced.

From my experience in Egypt I can share that there is always a temptation when we face injustice and suffering. When hate and thoughts of revenge arise we lose our patience and our ability to forgive. But because of our faith in Jesus Christ who loved us first, he is very patient and merciful with us. We know he will come soon and save us. Therefore we get help and power from God to be patient and to love.

5. Love overcomes hatred

In August 2013 my church in Egypt, the Mallawi Evangelical Church, was attacked by radical Muslims and they burned it down and destroyed it completely.⁵ But in the same week the members of Church stood on the powdery residue left of the burned Church building and prayed to God. God came to them and comforted them and gave them patience and the spirit of forgiveness. Now they are starting to rebuild the building again with the help from God. In the midst of darkness there is always a beam of light which comes from God giving hope, patience, and the ability to love.

I would like to draw your attention again to the river Nile. The water can carry us and the water has incredible power and makes life possible. To tap into the reservoir of God's unending mercies is like drinking from the river. In times of trouble and in times of great joy we can rely on the fountain of living water. We are serving a living God and therefore we can face tomorrow.

The message of the Advent reminds us how God showed his love through the birth of Jesus. The world at that time was full of hate and darkness. Nothing has changed. However the poured out love can be experienced, sometimes in times of trouble. It is a miracle indeed. Hatred does not have the final word but hope, light and love. Let us together patiently wait until the coming of Christ.

Amen.

⁵ <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/evangelical-presbyterian-church-of-egypt-synod-of-the-nile>; letzter Zugriff am 16.10.2015.