

**Ecumenical Conference on Mission today 2021/5/29**

**Morning Prayer**

**Dr. Christel Weber**

Welcome! Good morning!

This is the day that God has made. Would you like to repeat it with me? This is the day that God has made.

God's day. When God sends us into the day, it's not just with our heads.

So loosen up your fingers, the neck that gets stiff so fast, the eyes that work hard in front of the screen, the jaw, the chest, the legs, feet, toes.

Mission needs the whole person.

I encourage you to stand up, walk around, stretch to the right and to the left, up and down.

Three minutes of music and a picture are supposed to help you do that!

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**Music**

**A Walk through the city (Acts 17:22ff.)**

Are you ready? Ready for a walk through the city?

The apostle Paul leads the way:

From Acts, chapter 17, we hear:

*Paul stood up into the middle of the council on Mars Hill and said, "People of Athens! From what I see, you are very religious people. As I was walking through town and carefully observing your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription 'To an unknown god.' What you worship as unknown I proclaim to you. God who created the world and everything in it, is Lord of heaven and earth. He does not dwell in temples built by human hands. Nor is God served by human hands, as though he needed something, since he is the one who gives life, breath, and everything else. (...) He has set a day to judge the whole world with justice (...) God made the nations so they would seek him, perhaps even reach out to him and find him. In fact, God isn't far away from any of us. In God we live, move, and have our being. As some of your own poets said, "We are his offspring, of divine kind."*

Every now and then I walk through the city. I don't take money with me. I don't take a credit card, a voucher, a purse. Not even my cell phone. I walk for 1-2 hours, half a day at most. I don't go window shopping or buy anything. I also don't put on official clothes, a collar shirt for example. I don't want to attract attention. I let myself drift through the city - aimlessly - and keep myself open to what happens. Paul models it: He walks through Athens, open and curious.

In doing so I am driven by a word of Jesus: "I am the way, the truth and the life." I am the way. Or as the Jesuit Christian Herwartz says: God is the street. Here on the

street in the city, God is to be found. Here is holy ground. My walks through the city are a spiritual exercise. "Street retreats" is what Christian Herwartz calls them.

The "street retreats" have no missionary intention in the old sense. I do not bring God to any man or woman. I do not take God where he is not yet. Instead, I walk trusting **that God is already there**. Perhaps he will meet me - on the street, where - according to the New Testament - most encounters with Jesus took place. In the midst of life. The Jesuits call it "Finding God in all things." Paul calls it "discovering the unknown God."

I am leaving my house, taking Paul with me in my pocket. I turn right into a park. A man is playing table tennis with his daughter. I see both of them here every noon since the schools have been closed. What a good father! I send a quick "thank you" to heaven.

At the local grocery store, I wave to the clerk from the outside. The other day I wanted to be empathetic and asked him how he was coping with the Corona situation. He laughed: "It's like being on vacation. Everything is totally relaxing. People come less often, and I am constantly asked how I'm doing." I was surprised. God and COVID19 – a still interesting connection that I need to reflect about it further.

The flower stall on the market is bustling with activity. In passing - two young women in long skirts slip me a note: "Salvation in Jesus" is written on it. "Where is Jesus?" I ask them. After all, I am on my way to find God! The two are happy to hear my question: "In prayer. You just have to surrender yourself to Jesus in prayer," one says. "We can pray for you right here now!" the other one says quickly. "Oh no," I say, taking a step back, "Nice, but thanks!" and continue walking.

Now that the city is comparatively empty, I particularly notice the begging people. In front of the Nicolai Church, a woman is sitting on the ground. She makes a submissive gesture. I angrily wonder if someone has forced her to sit here. Or is she sitting here of her own will - for whom? For herself? For her children? Paul announces from my pocket, "God has set a day to judge the whole world with justice." Now I am longing for that day.

A choir welcomes me at the next square. Insistent voices are urging me to surrender my life to Jesus. Two men are approaching me. Quite close. I feel uncomfortable. "Do you know Jesus?" the older one asks. "Phhh, knowing is too much to say." "I also come from a family of disbelievers," the younger one continues. "If you are looking for Jesus, then throw yourself on the ground, that's how I did it, and confess all your sins to him, and then you will feel his love. Then it will go 'boom' in your heart! I can promise you that."

Next to us, someone shouts into the microphone, "When you surrender your life to Jesus, he erases your image. Then you are a blank, a white page again." Now I am getting tired of it: "Thank you," I say to the two men, "I don't think this is for me." I feel repulsed, but it takes me a little while to realize why: I feel ignored. They seem to collect conversion objects like pupils collect smiley faces. They don't want to know anything about my ideas and experiences with God. Do we as a church also act like

this? So disinterested in real dialogues? So full of sectarian language, a world divided into "we" and "the other" and - above all - so full of ourselves?

Paul drums in my pocket like mad: "In him, in God, we live, move and have our being, the whole humankind, all the God-seekers who long for him." "We are his offsprings," he shouts, "all are of divine kind. And it is true, God is not far from any of us."

I am shaken. I don't want to erase anyone's image. I want to love it with its beauty, with its furrows, its edges, its wounds. And I believe that it will transform through love, not through fear and threats.

I decide to turn back. It's enough for today. Two teenagers jump across the street. They rejoice in their purchase as if it preyed it. "You are of divine kind," I softly whisper to them. And it feels like a secret/stealthy blessing.

That's when it clicks for me: I keep walking, filling the street with the words Paul shouted on the streets of Athens. I do it with silent lip movements, with my glances: I say it to the child, so gloriously free of a mask, pedaling through the pedestrian zone on a little bike, "Of divine kind. You are not far from God." I whisper it to the clerk in the local store. I also say it in the direction of my missionary brothers and sisters on the main square. "You are of divine kind. God is not far from you." I feel strangely reconciled with them. We all search for God, Paul says, wondering if we can feel him and find him. But God has always been there.

Near the church, I sit down on a bench. Two brothers with a lot of beer bottles around them are sitting on the bench next to me. I pluck up my courage and ask, "Tell me, I mean, can you tell me where God is?"

"Good question.... Well, everywhere, I would say," says one, somehow slurring his words. "Even here with you?" I ask. That's when the other gets serious: "Who else do you think gives me the kick every damn morning to even get up?"

"Of divine kind. You're not far from God," I mutter, and then loudly, "Thank you very much! You helped me a lot" and then I get up and go home. The city is full of God. Everywhere his creatures live, love, sigh, struggle, hope. God in the street, the unknown God, Lord of heaven and earth. Alive. Somewhere he has met me. Amen.

### **Intercessions:**

We are going to pray together: You can write your prayers in the chat. Music will go along with your praying and writing. You can write in German or English or French. We will read the prayers aloud afterwards.

### **Music**

Let us bless one another. We join hands over the edge of our tiles.

### **Blessing**

God bless you and keep you. May God make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. May God turn his face toward you and give you and the world peace.

