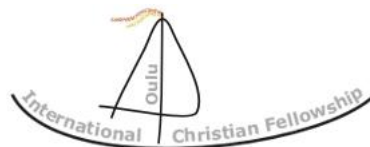


International Christian Fellowship of Oulu Worship Meeting



Date & Time: Sunday, 17.1.2010 at 16.00

Place: Chapel of St. Luke

Topic: Bible Verse 2010, John 14:1

Author: Bastian Fähnrich

Sources: Bible New International Version (www.biblegateway.com)

Welcome

Beloved sisters and brothers in Christ!

Today is the third Sunday in the new year, 2010, and we've come together to worship God, and to remember that Christmas, even though we've passed it in our calendars, is still going on, is an everyday event for us as believers in Jesus.

So, welcome to join in for this worship meeting! Take your seats, get prepared to listen to today's reading and message and apply its teachings in your lives, as I will do in mine.

For those who want to read up the message later on in more detail, you may download it from our website at <http://icfo.wordpress.com> or <http://www.church.fi/oulu>

Let's start with an opening prayer.

Opening Prayer

Lord, thank you for bringing us here today to worship together, to praise you, sing songs and devote ourselves to listen and to adhere to your Holy Word.

May You open up the Bible to us for our daily application in this new year 2010, and beyond, of course. Bless us, and also the ones that cannot be here today to obtain the readings and interpretation of Scripture.

Prepare our hearts and minds to be receptive, nourish us with your Holy Word, so that we may have strong faith in You and trust You continuously, until the end of our lives.

Let your Holy Spirit help us to understand Scripture and Your will for each of us individually as your followers, and collectively as a congregation, as members joined in Christ Jesus.

Give us direction, show us the way that we have to walk, step by step, according to Your direction, so that we may once meet you and be finally face-to-face with you, along with many others that (have) come to believe Christ Jesus as Saviour and Redeemer.

Lord, we also ask you to forgive us all our sins that hinder us from approaching and following You! Also, let us forgive those who sinned against us, so that we all may come before you and go ahead with a clean and pure conscience, and that nothing wrong in Your eyes resides in us, that we become and stay truly holy, and more like You, o God.

In Jesus Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Songs

We rest on Thee, no. 735.

Jesus, name above all names, no. 375

A few more songs according to suggestions of congregation.

Introduction

The topic for today's message is the "Bible Verse 2010". It can be found in John 14:1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me."

This year's Bible verse is taken from the Losungen, a booklet including a yearly Bible verse and readings for each day of the year. The Losungen have been regularly drawn and published by the Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine Community in Germany (originally a Christian evangelical congregation nearby Dresden) since 1731. The latest edition of the Losungen in 2010 numbers up to volume 280.

The booklet is published every year in about 50 languages. It originated by means of gatherings and devotions in the Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine Community based on the idea of Count Nikolaus Ludwig Zinzendorf. Initially the community drew a Losung (= slogan, motto, watchword) from the Bible each day but later proceeded to draw them for an entire year in advance.

The Losungen consist of a daily Old Testament and New Testament reading and a song, text etc. of a Christian believer. The Losungen are supposed to lead into studying the Bible and prayer on every day of the year. They also include a monthly Bible verse.

More information about the Losungen and the Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine Community can be retrieved from the Internet at www.losungen.de and www.ebu.de

Let's continue and read the context of the Bible verse 2010, John 14:1, and explore the passage's meaning in more detail.

Reading

To start with, and to get a better overview and the context of the Bible Verse 2010, let's read together John 14 in its entirety. I encourage each of us to read – at home – also John 13, 15, 16 and 17.

Message

Dear congregation!

Jesus' disciples, which means 'students' or 'pupils', had been following Christ, their 'rabbi' or 'teacher', for quite a while, some as early as the day of Jesus' baptism. The disciples had received the calling from Him, from Jesus Christ Himself, and left everything to follow this man, whom they recognised and believed to be the Messiah, Son of God. Until that day respectively evening, they had simply put their faith and trust in Christ, and had followed Him wherever He went to. They had followed Him whatever He did and commanded them to do: to preach, teach and heal.

They had witnessed Jesus' miracles, gathered crowds with Him and called more followers into His presence, invited them to walk in His footsteps. They had prayed with Him, faced storms where their faith had been tested continuously and in many ways. But over and over again Jesus had comforted them, showed them that He is faithful and trustworthy. However, now, on the day respectively evening before Christ's death on the cross the disciples experience Jesus in ways that go beyond their understanding. Christ announces to them that He has to leave them, according to the will of God the Father. On that evening Jesus purposefully tells them about things ahead, His death and resurrection, and mentions that He will go to a place where the disciples cannot follow Him – at least not yet, for the time being. They don't come to know how long it will last to finally meet and see Jesus again.

Jesus speaks to the disciples on that evening after having indicated to them that one [Judas Iscariot] amidst them will betray Him and that He will have to die (John 13:33): "I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me (...), and I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come". Christ repeats this, upon request of one of his disciples (John 13:36): "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later". Jesus promises the disciples (John 13:7): "You do not realise now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

Jesus also says that He will go to Heaven to "prepare a place for you [them]" (John 14:2) and that, as long as the disciples remain in His love, faithful to Him, trust Him and obey His commandments, that God the Father and He will "come to him [them] and make our [their] home with him [them]" (John 14:23).

Moreover, Jesus tells the disciples that they "know the way to the place where I am [He is] going." He, Christ, the Son of God, is the only way to the Father (John 14:6), to Heaven, where He is headed to, and from where He will return later on (John 14:3): "And if I [Jesus] go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you with me that you also may be where I am."

For the meantime Jesus promises that the disciples and, in fact, every believer will receive the Holy Spirit as counsellor and helper (John 15:26). He states that the Holy Spirit will guide them and let them know everything they need in order to live a Christian life and remain faithful and trust in God. The Holy Spirit will also help the disciples and fellow believers to testify about Christ to other people (John 15:27). Jesus also states that "in this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world!" (John 16:33).

In addition, Jesus promises that He will leave His peace to the disciples, so that their hearts need not be troubled, and they don't need to fear (John 14:1, 27b): "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; and trust in me." And "Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

Beloved sisters and brothers in Christ!

In today's reading we can see that the disciples had a really difficult time to understand Jesus on that evening, when he was speaking to them, fortelling things that sounded so unbelievable, so horrible. Remember that shortly after Jesus' talk with His disciples He got arrested, trialed and put to death. Of course, later on, the disciples had the chance to better understand Jesus' words, just as Christ had told them. That is, some time after that evening they understood most of the things Jesus had told them. More precisely, the disciples began to understand Jesus after they had seen or heard about Christ's death, resurrection, appearance and ascension to Heaven and the Holy Spirit's descension at Pentecost, or, for the disciples, already during one of Jesus' appearances to them (John 20:19-23).

And yet we can imagine how difficult it must have been for them to not understand Christ right away on that evening. They needed to simply trust Him and His words. We also read how difficult that was for the disciples, and that they asked for more details and, at times, Jesus gave in, and gently and patiently answered their questions (see, for example, Thomas in John 14:5-7, Philip in 8-21, and Judas, son of James in 22-31). In fact, the whole chapter 14 of John's Gospel is a conversation guided by the disciples' questions and Jesus' answers to them, responding to the situation they all found themselves in.

How much easier it is for us today to follow Christ words, as we already know the path of history, of His story, based on reading the Bible! We know about Jesus, and how He eventually overcame the trouble of all troubles – the death on the cross. Yes. Jesus' heart was also troubled, when He followed the will of God the Father to die on the cross for us (John 12:27). It is good to know about this, but even better to know that Jesus made it, He went through the pain of death, and came again to life and is alive, now and forever! Moreover, we know about the disciples' lives, how they overcame the troubles that they had to face! We also know that every disciple had to do bear Jesus' words in mind when facing troubles in their later lives, mostly due to the fact that they were professing their faith in Christ in word and deed. Since

Christ was absent in Heaven, the disciples and Christian believers had only at their disposal the Holy Spirit, and the hope for the glorious second coming of Christ as described in Revelation. Furthermore, the disciples and followers of Christ were left on this earth with Jesus' words, promises, His peace, and commandments, which say to love Him and one another just as He loved them (John 14:15,23 and 15:9-17), and to spread the Gospel to all humankind (Mark 16:14-18).

Think about it, let's take this to heart: the disciples and other believers of the early Church (and we today as well) trusted God fearlessly with the help that God provided! In and through their troubles they didn't get too afraid but went on, just as Jesus had commanded, encouraging others to accept Christ as Saviour and Redeemer and live a Christian life.

How could they do so? Let's look at an example from the New Testament, and explore the troubling situation when Paul and Silas were imprisoned in Philippi, a Roman colony and leading city in Macedonia. The story is told in Acts 16:16-40, and I'll just summarise it for us: Paul and Silas had been faithfully following Christ. In Philippi, they came to see a slave girl, who was used by their owners to make money by fortune-telling, and she was possessed by an evil spirit. Paul became troubled, and drove out the spirit by saying (Acts 16:18): "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her." The spirit left, but the owners were not pleased and accused Paul and Silas before the city's authorities. They got arrested, severely beaten up and brought to prison, simply because they were faithfully following Christ. You may read up the details later at home! In their prison cell, being wounded and in chains, however, instead of being frightened and groaning in pain, they prayed and sang hymns, which the other prisoners heard. Later on, in the night, Paul and Silas were miraculously freed by an earthquake. Yet they didn't flee from that horrible place but met the jailor at the prison doors, and testified to him, and he along with his household came to faith in Jesus Christ. Later on they also went to fellow believers, to Lydia's house, most likely to share the good news with them and to say farewell.

See what Paul and Silas did, how they faced their troubles! Initially there was no way out of prison, they had no chance to escape, for even their feet were fastened in the stocks! They were injured, maybe it would have even hurt badly to try to walk etc.! What did they do? They put their trust in the Lord, they didn't allow their hearts to be troubled. I'm sure they must have been afraid for moments, split seconds, for instance, when their wounds caused pain and the cold stones and darkness was capturing their attention. At these times they were maybe wondering and pondering on Jesus' words, that He will "prepare a place for you [them]" (John 14:2) and that He will "come to him [them] and make our [their] home with him [them]" (John 14:23). I think they had faith enough to know that Christ, even though absent in Heaven but present through the Holy Spirit, resided in them, that they were His temple, part of His church, that they can always find refuge and dwell in Him, and endure, persevere, overcome all the troubles they face at times, for the time being: the ones in the prison in Philippi (see 1 Corinthians 6:19; 12:12,27; Ephesians 2:22,3:17).

Perhaps Paul and Silas also didn't even think about leaving, or escaping from their prison. After all, they knew that they were on the right track, and thus they didn't need to take the troubling situation too much to heart nor look for a way out, but rather fix their eyes and entire being – soul, body and spirit – on Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:2). And through their faith and trust in the Lord they eventually overcame their fear and troubles, with God's help, of course. Moreover, by praying and singing hymns and testifying, Paul and Silas also inspired others, at least the jailor and his household, to break chains of fear and imprisonment and to become Christian believers.

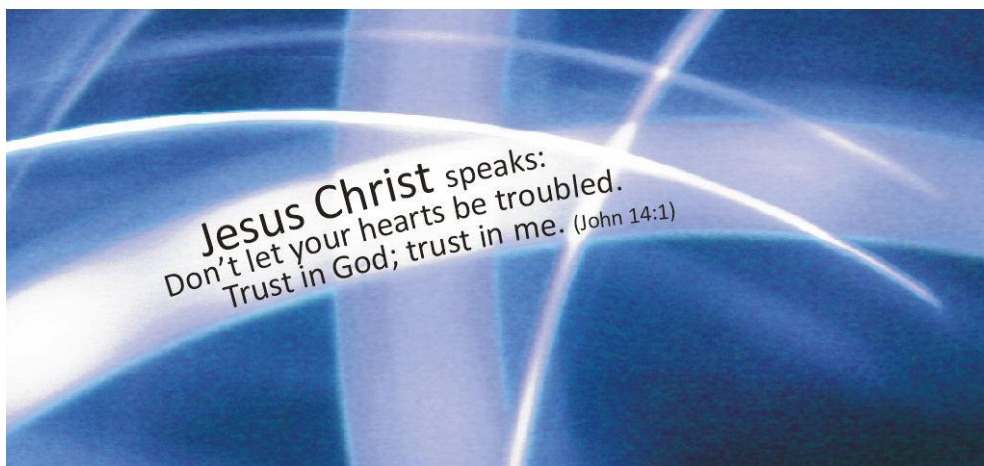
Dear sisters and brothers in Christ!

Let's hope that we won't face these kind of troubles in our lives, or in this year 2010. For sure, we don't know what is ahead, what kind of situations we will have to go through and, in particular, how and where and when our faith and trust in the Lord is going to be tested. Let us not be worried (Mark 13:11), let's do not allow fear to reside in us (except for the fear of God, see Luke 12:5), for Jesus doesn't want to see us being afraid too much and become paralysed

due to fearful circumstances. Thus let us become and/or stay as Jesus' disciples, go on, move on, talk and walk the Christian faith, follow Him in His footsteps, everywhere, wherever God may lead us, you and me as individuals and as a congregation!

We surely know the direction, we can be certain about the ultimate aim of our lives – to be with God in Heaven, or rather in/on the new heaven and earth. We are reminded about the final destination and how to get there through Jesus Christ and the ones that walked in "His paths" (Isaiah 2:3, Micah 4:2) before us. Yes, it's most likely going to be "a long run" and it comes with troubles, as Paul pointed out (2 Corinthians 4:14-18, Hebrews 12:1). But Jesus, the Holy Spirit and His peace and word will be with us until the very end of times (Matthew 28:20). Christ wants us to keep going and to gather a bigger crowd that once shall enter His place (John 14:2), His dwelling like it is foretold in Revelation 21:3: "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God." And as we know where we are ultimately heading to, we can look forward to it, rejoice, encourage each other, side by side as Paul and Silas, and thus overcome all possible fears and troubles with perseverance, endurance and the strength and power of God Almighty. For Jesus, our Lord said to His disciples and to us as His followers: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me." (John 14:1). Amen.

When we leave the church today or go over to spend some time in fellowship, please take along the sticker with this year's Bible verse. I placed it already on your seats, and more are available at the exit.



Put the sticker in your purse or tag it to your refrigerator etc.! May it remind you and me this year 2010 and beyond of our God who keeps us going in His footsteps any time by His Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit ;-)

Here's also a list of the disciples of Jesus Christ, just for your information (see Matthew 9:35-10:8, Mark 3:13-19, Luke 6:12-18, John 1:35-42, Acts 1:12-26):

- Peter - Fisherman, son of John (formerly Simon)
- Andrew - Fisherman, son of John, Simon Peter's brother
- James - Fisherman, son of Zebedee, son of Boanerges (thunder)
- John - Fisherman, son of Zebedee, Boanerges (thunder), brother of James
- Philip - From Bethsaida
- Matthew - tax collector, son of Alphaeus
- Nathanael (Bartholomew) - from Cana, a "true Israelite"
- Thomas
- James, son of Alphaeus
- Simon, the Zealot - Guerrilla fighter
- Judas, son of James
- Judas Iscariot - Guerrilla fighter, son of Simon (later replaced by Matthias, see Acts 1:12-26)

Songs

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, no. 712
What a friend we have in Jesus, no. 746

Thanksgiving and Prayer

Let's get together in small groups (3-5 people) and spend a few minutes in prayer. If you want, please share with each other items of thanks and praise where you have been delivered from troubling situation through your faith and trust in God. In addition, pray with each other for people whom you know are in troubles, either yourself, friends, family, or entire nations in the world, whatever the Lord puts on your mind and heart. I will then conclude our thanksgiving and prayer with a closing prayer.

Closing Prayer

Lord, thank you for being a faithful and trustworthy God. There is none like you! We have faith and trust in you that you are rejoicing of all our reasons to give you thanks and praise, and, likewise, that you will answer our prayer requests according to your Holy and unfailing will.

We conclude with slightly modified words taken from Psalm 46, 37 and 33, and Isaiah 26: God, Heavenly Father, You are our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. You keep us in perfect peace. Therefore we do not fear but trust in you forever! We commit our ways to You, o Lord! Let our hearts rejoice, for we trust in Your holy name. In the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Redeemer we pray. Amen.

Benediction

Let's sing the blessing song together:

*/: May the Lord bless us and keep us,
With His power be ever beside us;
May the Lord look with favour upon us,
And give us His peace :/*

Announcements

20.1. at 19.00 Bible study at Bastian's

Fellowship Time

Chatting over cup of tea or coffee, voluntary offertory, e-mail list, guest book, clean-up...