



Pressezentrum

Sperrfrist:	28. Mai 2017 12.00 Uhr
Projekt:	Festgottesdienst
Veranstaltung:	Von Angesicht zu Angesicht
Zeit, Ort:	So. 12.00 – 13.30, Bühne auf der Gottesdienstwiese, Lutherstadt Wittenberg
Referent/in:	Erzbischof Thabo Makgoba, Primas Anglikanische Kirche in Südafrika, Kapstadt/ Südafrika

Thank you all for your warm welcome. I am honoured to be here on the beautiful Elbe meadows before the gates of Lutherstadt-Wittenberg. It is a great privilege to take part in launching the Reformation Summer and celebrating Kirchentag 2017.

Thank you. Danke schön.

Here in front of me, I see the true spirit of tolerance, amplified by the understanding of the benefits of a multicultural society. Thank you for your witness to the world. Vielen dank.

Friends, it is impossible to overstate the contribution of Martin Luther to that part of the world influenced by Europe and its thought. His questioning of authority ignited and illuminated a civilization that became the catalyst for millions leaving the Dark Ages. He was one of the true fathers of democratic freedom. He mobilized millions, in an unstoppable movement, to embrace the right to participate. He made it safe to want to be part of something bigger than ourselves.

The Reformation which he initiated was more than a theological watershed. It was a defining moment in our sociological and political evolution. But the Reformation is not something which concerns only our past.

Interpreted in today's context, it can become our guide, our inspirational GPS, our global positioning system for the next 500 years.

The histories of both of our countries – that of Germany in the Nazi era, and of South Africa in the apartheid era – are records of unspeakable cruelty. But they are also histories of God's unfailing faithfulness. They both speak of the challenge to find the Holy One who is, as the hymn says, "standing somewhere in the shadows ... and you'll know Him by the nail prints in His hands." Our histories are testimony to the power of Hagar's words when she says: "You see me."

For any African, Hagar's story is deeply etched into both our historical DNA and our contemporary experience. Dolores Williams reminds us that Hagar's predicament involved slavery, poverty, sexual and economic exploitation, surrogacy, rape, domestic violence and homelessness.

Black people generally but particularly black women in South Africa know exactly the same realities. They know that in so many contexts, "black lives do not matter."

But as we read the Hagar story further, we find that alongside this litany of suffering and exclusion, there is also the story of a God who acts in a powerful way. When Hagar finds herself vulnerable on the periphery, God gives her the resources to survive. Just like the Syrian refugee you have welcomed into Germany, Hagar stands as a beacon of hope to all who suffer, to the oppressed around the world.

Paul's words today also speak to the heart of our human responsibility and the values that cradle it. The radical love that he describes – agape – is the love of God, unconditional love, love in action.

It is a love that reassures us that God indeed does see us. But can we say in turn that we see God? The answer is "No." Because God's love is a love so wide and deep we can never fully comprehend it. As Paul says, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face."

But until the time comes when we see God face to face, what we can do is to strive to make our lives – my life and your lives – a mirror of God's love for the world. Does our neighbour, the foreigner, the refugee, my enemy, see in our lives something of God's unconditional love? We will never truly understand the extraordinary nature of that love. But we can try to live in such a way that others might see in our lives something of the uniqueness of God's love.

Paul writes reminds us that in essence we are seen and we are transformed into God's likeness to do the very things God does: to be present in times of suffering, to liberate ourselves and every unjust situation from the multiple bondages that hold so many millions in captivity, to speak a word of hope in moments of despair. We are challenged to bless others with our love, to see them as they are seen by God and in seeing them to journey with them through the world of injustice and brokenness.

Let me end with a special challenge to those of you who are young. As you live the Kirchentag, I charge you to hear the cries of others and of our planet as God would. My prayer is that you will be radical; that you will give love away – even as you recognise your frailties and limitations, even if you are daunted by the enormity of the task of transforming the world.

Even if you feel that you are seeing the challenges only dimly, please do something, at least one thing, for love's sake, for dignity's sake, for freedom's sake, for Christ's sake.

Martin Luther King Junior famously spoke about a dream that he had for his country. Like King, I have a dream for the world: that one day soon all the narcissistic, nationalist, isolationist ramblings of our current times will disappear. I have a dream that instead there will arise a global awareness that we are of one humanity. I have a dream that we will all sit together to decide: "What is in the best interests not of this or that group, but of all of society?" I have a dream that your children, and mine, will one day live in an Africa and in a world that has an abundance of unlimited and equal access to education, to health care, to water and sanitation and to economic opportunities.

Will you, young people and older people, help me realise that dream? Please help me.

God bless you, God bless your families and God bless Germany. Danke schön, and Amen.

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