



REV DR ANNE BURGHARDT, LWF GENERAL SECRETARY SERMON AT CLOSING WORSHIP

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, dear LWF family!

We gathered to this assembly from east and west, north and south. We all speak different languages, and still we understood each other here at the assembly, it was a bit like the Pentecostal wonder in Acts 2 where God's One Holy Spirit made people with different mother tongues to one communion, one church. Experiencing unity and understanding between different people feels a bit like Heaven, a bit like paradise, already here. We all need these moments. They make us happy, enrich our souls, let us experience the blowing of the One Holy Spirit of God.

When speaking of Heaven, it is not easy to describe it. Throughout the ages poets from all around the world have tried to capture Heaven in their poetry, to find an appropriate way to describe celestial experiences. In the Bible we find several metaphorical descriptions of Heaven. Jesus describes Heaven in one of the parables as the Great Wedding, a feast of joy, thankfulness and gladness in unity with God and the bridegroom Christ.

The Book of Revelation offers here an apocalyptic vision, not of a feast but of an already ongoing eternal worship service. We encounter the vision of this everlasting worship before the throne of God already in the writing of the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel. This vision has inspired our Christian liturgy. At Holy Communion, we sing the Sanctus from Isaiah 6: Holy! Holy! Holy! There are other parts of the Heavenly liturgy, that we have integrated into our worship. Never underestimate the power of prayer that unites us in the communion of saints, that unites us with our sisters and brothers across times and continents!



LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND
FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE
FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL

P.O. Box 2100
Route de Ferney 150
CH-1211 Geneva 2
Email: lwf.info@lutheranworld.org



The author of the Book of Revelation leads us to see “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those, who love God” (1 Corinthians 2,9). The author leads us to see how the slaughtered Lamb that has conquered death has gained the final victory. And as it was so well pointed out yesterday during the thematic plenary on One Hope, the final victory is not attained by the mighty lion, not even a lion feeding on straw (Isaiah 11,7), but by the slaughtered Lamb. The final word, the final victory does not belong to the emperor but to the Lamb of God, just as the first Christians refused to sing “Kyrie” to the emperor, as it was common in Rome. Therefore the Book of Revelation describes how they cry out in a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb!”

In the midst of the realities of our world, it might sometimes be difficult to believe in the victory of the Lamb. Participation in the suffering of Christ, communion in the cross of Christ continues to be part of our lives, as we have to admit that the world and human nature didn't change overnight with God's incarnation in Jesus and in His resurrection. And yet everything did change because if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being!”, as we read in 2 Cor 5:17.

As the beloved of Christ, we are called to the one hope through our one baptism and one faith, we are called to be those who make the new creation and the endless joy over the victory of the Lamb visible in this world. Against the injustices of the world, against all those moments of what seems to be decisive defeat, denial, and shame, against the threat of evil, - escaping from the world won't help us, nor will sinking into hopelessness. God's people live from the strength of the victorious Lamb. The beloved of Christ live, as if they were already before the throne of the Lamb. They are not paralyzed by their worries and don't let fear rule over their lives.

Yes, though John offers us a vision of an eschatological reality, this reality is not only something for a distant future. This eschatological reality breaks into our reality here and now. Not only in the sacrament of Holy Communion, not only in the worship, but also in moments where the fruits of the Holy Spirit become visible: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Nurtured by





the prayer and worship, we march together and sing and participate in God's work of renewing the world, we live the liturgy after the liturgy where ordinary, everyday life becomes service of God, to use the image offered by Luther.

John the Divine describes the participants of this heavenly worship service that already begins here in our space and time. A great multitude that no one could count stands before the throne, praising God. Finally, people no longer wage war against one another. They stand summoned before the Lamb, God is revealed before their eyes. They all are filled with endless joy, astonishment, and praise! Adam's and Eve's lament is over. The torn bodies of the past are no longer a reason to mourn. Because Christ's body is resurrected, other bodies will be resurrected. No death can hold them anymore. And God wipes every single tear from the eyes of those who suffered. New creation, new bodies can't be broken anymore. The One Body of Christ is alive, it is unbreakable, not for sale, not to be spoiled.

But, it is not only the uncountable people from all nations and the elders, forming the One ever-living Body of Christ, risen through Christ's resurrection. There are also four animals before the throne of God. In the Jewish apocalyptic the animals are often human realms/empires, who are overcome by God's might. Here these animals are part of the heavenly court. Their duty is to praise God—and this only succeeds, when one is filled with the Love of God. The animals are often identified with the four gospels. God's One Spirit lives in the four gospels. Although the four gospels are different and were written for different communities, it is the ONE Spirit of God that speaks through them. Unifying and healing, summoning and comforting, challenging and loving. The Spirit is One and draws Christ in front of our eyes. The Spirit lets us look towards the victorious lamb. She offers direction to our thoughts, word and deeds, to praise the Lamb and to serve the Lamb in this world, by doing the work of the Lamb: reconciling, unifying, healing, challenging and comforting, serving the neighbor, connecting with God.

We participate in this work in two directions, as there are two beams on the cross. We worship God, and are freed by God to serve our neighbour and to care for all creation. All – human beings and creation – are included in this movement, in this march



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towards the Lamb and towards one another. Yes, creation is also our neighbor and it is crying out.

Sometimes, dear Lutheran family, we need a moment of Heaven, like we have experienced time and again here in this Assembly. May God continue to grant us these moments of communion with God and with one another. May God continue to deepen our communion. May God bless our bodies and Christ's One Body. May God lead us and empower us with the One Spirit, that draws Jesus Christ before our eyes. May our hearts be filled with hope that bears its fruit already today in and for our world. May God bless us and let us be a blessing for this world. Amen.

The [Thirteenth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation](#) takes place 13-19 September 2023 in Krakow, Poland. The theme of the Assembly will be "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope." It will be hosted by the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland.

Assembly media contact: Ms Cornelia Kästner-Meyer, Senior Communication Officer, cornelia.kaestner@lutheranworld.org tel. +41 79 106 0974



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