

DOC.ID:	PRA_05
Language:	English
Original:	English



## Sermon for the Sending Service

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*The days are surely coming, says God through Jeremiah. And we can answer – Yes, the day has surely come!*

Jeremiah had a great vision for God's relation with the people – not a covenant based on rules, laws and knowledge of God and the people being an obedient family. Devastation, grief and despair are often the circumstances of Jeremiah. But in this part of the book, called the little book of consolation, joy overtakes grief and singing replaces weeping. The message is healing and new life. In the past Israel had broken the covenant repeatedly, but God has not abandoned them no matter what their infidelities.

In the prophecy of Jeremiah we can feel the presence of a new spirit. A spirit who will lead the people not by the hand as in the old days, but by the heart, because the will and love of God will be written in the hearts of God's people – a new covenant! Jeremiah thought of a new covenant for the house of Israel and Judah – but for us it has turned into something new – the whole world. God will make this possible!

A fundamental aspect of that restored society is that everyone “from the least to the greatest” will live in covenant relationship. In the covenant no one can claim special revelation or superior intimacy with God. All will know God. Inherent in this vision is an egalitarian claim that challenges religious domination by the chosen few. It contains resources, for example; women's hopes, young people's hope, hope for lay people, hope for the poor and for the disabled. A hope for a new order of social relations that are based on human dignity and interdependence. It is also a token for the environment. There is no hierarchy that makes humans sovereigns over the earth rather than its partner. For Jeremiah people are part of the earth and its fate depends on their fidelity. It is a responsibility entrusted to us.

The way a society treats the earth often correlates with the way it treats other oppressed groups. Traditionally women are linked with the earth as subordinate to men. Jeremiah's



words challenge this assumption. The earth and all inhabitants are God's creation and the survival of the individual depends on the whole.

Today we can hear the voice of God saying – *I will be your God. We can answer out of our hearts – Yes, we are your people.*

We, the representatives of the peoples of Europe, gathered here in Lyon

- We have celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Conference of European Churches and the anniversary of the Church and Society Commission.
- We have scrutinized the six years way from Trondheim. We have talked about improvements, sleeping achievements and dead ends.
- We have entered into the long prepared marriage between the Conference of European and the Churches Commissions for Migrants in Europe. We have to pray for a life-giving conception, awaiting the European Churches responding to Migration 2010.
- We have tried to tackle the difficult financial situation
- We have worshipped and experienced different traditions of spirituality
- We have been given inputs of hope from other continents and listened to “how to tango in Latin America”
- Not least - we have set up a framework of goals for the future ecumenical movement in our region of the world and prepared the means for a revised CEC.

The future is the most important – because Christ is not coming from behind, through the two thousand years of history of the Christian Church or should I say churches. Christ is coming from the future and meets us as the God who creates, reconciles and renews life. That is a great mystery of Christian faith – Christ who once and for all redeemed us from evil, death and the darkness of the past is coming from the future as the Resurrected. Christ lives in the future and from there he comes to meet us when we live with our hopes set forward.

Like in the early morning when Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to the empty tomb and got the message that Jesus will go before them to Galilee. On the way to tell his disciples they met Jesus, who greets them and they in turn worshipped him and they became the first witnesses of the resurrection and the first missionaries of the Church. Later in Galilee, there he was on the mountain, from the future, to meet with his friends, giving them the commission of making disciples of all nations when baptising in the name of the Holy Trinity. Jesus often said that he was sent to the lost sheep of Israel, but in this great commission he asks them to go out to all nations. He will meet them in every place they go.



Wherever we go in this world – Christ has always been there before us, because Christ comes from the future.

Already in the words of Jeremiah we can discern the work of the Holy Trinity: God – the creator has given the foundation of the covenant, the new life in Christ and the Holy Spirit will open our hearts for the love and will of God.

And God says - *I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

That is us – we are God’s people here in Europe. We know about all things that separate us – languages, cultures, politics, religions, you name it! We celebrate different religious festivals; as Churches we even celebrate Easter at different dates. But we believe in the triune God and we share the same hope in Christ. We can offer a substantial contribution to Europe – of human values, unity and hope.

As the Churches of Europe we need to speak out and to say loud – We like to contribute!

### **We know about human values.**

A Christian view of humanity maintains that all people are created equal and are of equal value. Equality was already ours with creation, but it has often been perverted into oppression and injustice between the sexes, races, social groups and countries. Our vision is a society where the dignity of the individual is the central focus; where there is no longer any exclusion, oppression or poverty. It is a society where we all have the opportunity to fulfil our potentials as human beings. A world where the earth’s resources are shared by all and Creation is cared for and managed well for future generations. The common good is the goal of our efforts. This is a goal we share with everyone, irrespective of faiths.

### **We know about unity!**

The unity that God wants to give the world is not just the unity of the Churches, but the complete unity and affinity of the world, humanity and creation. We who are divided in so many ways we belong together at a profound level. Working ecumenically we give this affinity a concrete form. When Churches seek unity it is ultimately so that the world may live.

### **We are driven by hope!**

Our hope is that Christ will meet us from the future and create something new of us. We can recognise hope in the experience of being lost but found again. We have failed in many ways, we have betrayed God, our neighbours, creation and ourselves, but we get the opportunity of starting all over again. That is grace, thanks be to God - Creator, Redeemer and Life giver.

Amen.