

*Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (Gal 6:7-10 NIV)*¹

Watchword for this week: *Live as children of light for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness (agathwsune), righteousness (dikaiwsune) and truth (aletheia) (Eph 5:8-9 NIV)*

The full moon was quite a sight this week. So now it's waning again. The days however are getting longer again. The longest night of this winter has passed and we're again on our way to spring. Thank God for that! The new morning, the longer, warmer and more fruitful day in God's sunlight aptly describes our existence as Christians. Since Christmas and when our Lord Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, since he conquered sin, death and the devil on the cross and rising victoriously from the grave outside the gates of Jerusalem and since that glorious bounty of this was shared, given, granted, handed out, dished up and written over for us in the new testament and lasting covenant by the triune God to be ours forever written and inscribed not only into our hearts, minds and soul by the gracious gifts of the Holy Spirit in his word and sacrament, but also into the very hands of the Lord of life, our creator and saviour - we too are since then no longer in darkness and shadow of death, but rather are predestined, called and elected to live as children of light, living in the light of the very God, the only begotten Son's light – because by, through and in his goodness, righteousness and truth this is our destiny.²

This triune God is the foundation, structure, parameter and even content of our existence: the living God Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is from his goodness, righteousness and truth that we have life, redemption and eternal salvation. Take that away and you wither and pass away – gone with the wind and missing in the dark holes of the universe – like the grass in the field and the flowers in the meadows. Chopped off, it withers, dries and nobody knows its place anymore. That's the way of things. That's how they are. That's how we are. It is as Jesus said in yesterday's lesson: "Without me you can do nothing!" Without him we are nothing. Without him all and everything is empty, vain

¹ The apostle St. Paul writes to the Galatians. That's one of the most dearly beloved epistles for the reformer Dr. Martin Luther. He called it: "His letter!", because it put his life into divine perspective.

² That's what our Lord Jesus Christ describes so vividly in his illustration we heard in yesterday's confession as it was recorded by the evangelist St. John in the 15 chapter titled: Jesus the vine and we the branches and the Father the gardener.

and meaningless – absurd and ridiculous attempts to catch the wind. Something like Sisyphus condemned to endlessly roll up that heavy rock up and up and up, while it always just runs down, down, down.

The living God however gives meaning, structure and content to our life. When he created you, he wanted you to live in his image and according to his good, righteous and true will. To live like that he saved you from sin, death and devil in IX – forgiving you all your trespasses, your sinful inclination and your ever leaning over more to the dark side, your rotten genes and all inherited evil streaks, but also your malicious creativity to come up with new ways to be and do wrong, get off track and lose God's holy ways and his wholesome direction to a holy, godly and truly sanctified life. Yet by his merciful goodness, by his justifying righteousness and lasting truth you are no longer lost, but a child of God and as such inheritor, distributor and multiplier of his goodness, righteousness and truth, not some loose cannon causing more harm than good. Remember that!

It is one of the great mysteries and hanging questions: Why would Adam doubt the goodness of God – doubt his righteousness and truth – even as he was seeing, tasting, smelling, feeling, knowing God's goodness, righteousness and truth in far greater clarity, purity, proximity there in paradise. It was not God's fault. His boundless love, fatherly care and absolute goodness were faultless, perfect and not to be questioned. Yet, still Adam doubted his word and promise, doubted his goodness, his righteousness and truth. We know he was deceived by the great deceiver. Why did Adam believe, trust and hold that dark viper's bitter gall, putrid poison and vilest stench to be more trustworthy than God's holy word, which are even sweeter than honey, purer than water and more wholesome than milk? It shows us, how weak and deceptive we are, how terribly deceptive the awful deceiver, who lets light appear as darkness and darkness as the most shiny and pleasant light. It didn't just happen at the beginning.

Even today the son asks to leave the house of the father to live a better, more fulfilled life somewhere else. Even today the son, who stays at home all the days of his life does so begrudgingly, fearing that life is passing him by – angry with the father, angry with the world, angry with himself. It was not just yesteryear that Pharaoh was deceived to believe that it's opportune to disregard God's demand to let his people go. Even today the powerful tyrants of the world are deceived to think that they will get away with murder, with extracting the very lifeblood of the people entrusted to them. Deceived they rush into their destruction with wide open eyes and still don't see what's coming. The 3rd Reich was supposed to last a thousand years. It didn't even stay

for twenty years, not even 2 decades before it all came tumbling down in the most frightful disaster and destruction imaginable – “and all the kings men couldn’t put Humpty Dumpty together again”. The waves of the Red Sea came thundering down over them – drowning each and every one. Think of the ancient catastrophes of the great deluge – or the frightful storm of fire destroying Sodom and Gomorrah. The good God was quite willing to spare the city if there were but 10 who were righteous. That’s the truth. Yet, the people were deceived and thought they could get away with their horrendous evil, that was crying out to the high heavens. All were guilty, none were just – not even 10! In the end it was just punishment, destruction and nothing left but a warning to us – don’t be fooled. God can’t be mocked. It’s how things go. God’s judgement is coming – and nobody will get by on his own ticket. There is but one way, one truth and life. All roads may lead to Rome, but not all to heaven. Remember that!

People are too easily deceived. Judas thinks it’s a good idea to betray his master for 30 pieces of silver. Annanias and Saphira think it’s a good idea to hide some of their money and donate just a fraction, but doing as if it’s the whole thing, lying to their brothers and sisters, trying to deceive the Holy Spirit in the process. Herod thinks his brothers wife is pretty and commits adultery with her. He has John’s head chopped off, because he said “It’s not right!” – not good! Not righteous! Not according to God’s truth! Herod imprisons him and tops his monstrosity with murder. He doesn’t want to backtrack on his word – not admitting that it would be better to acknowledge, confess and repent some wrong than to just go on with it as if that would make it right. He’s deceived. He’s got it wrong. He doesn’t understand God’s goodness, righteousness and truth – although he’s king and although or was it because his subjects actually confused his words with those of Gods. In the end his end is frightful and quite terrible. Remember Psalm 73? This was not written for entertainment purposes, but as a warning for us: Don’t be deceived by the devil, by the unbelieving world, by your own sinful flesh, wrongful attitudes and unholy thoughts. God won’t be mocked. Don’t give up the faith. Be patient and hold on to God’s promises and follow his directions. They are not going to deceive you.

You see this is our daily story really. Being showered by God’s goodness, mercy and care from when we wake up until we lie down to sleep and yet how often do we doubt his goodness, righteousness and truth? Are not content, but rebellious, doubtful and deceived that life would be better

elsewhere, further away from God and following our own fixations and devious fascinations³. Following our own mind and discarding God's goodness, righteousness and truth. Going about abominations as if it is the order of the day, meantime it's just growing darkness, falling night and threatening shadows of death.

Therefore St. Paul writes: Do not be deceived: Let us not become weary of doing good... let us do good to all people! **Don't be** deceived – don't become weary of doing good.

1. **Ben Mokopanele**
2. **John Magala**
3. **Albert Payvah.**

God is good. He can't be mocked. His Spirit gives life – proper time (sowing, reaping) It's how things go. It takes time for the seed to die in the ground, to lie dormant before the sprouting of new life begins, the growing and eventually the bringing forth of fruit. Therefore be patient! Don't give up prematurely, don't throw away your hope, which has a great reward in the end. Don't stop doing the right thing. Continue to look and strive for and then to promote what is good, right and salutary with all you got. God himself is the highest good. Therefore "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." (Deu 6:4-5 NIV)

Let us conclude with today's Herrenhuter readings from God's word: *"But I the LORD will speak what I will, and it shall be fulfilled without delay. For in your days... I will fulfill whatever I say, declares the Sovereign LORD. "* (Eze 12:25 NIV) And added to that St. Paul's admonition and prayer: *"May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance."* (2Th 3:5 NIV)

Hymn 737: *Rejoice, my heart, be glad and sing...*

³ *"Wir stolzen Menschenkinder Sind eitel arme Sünder Und wissen gar nicht viel; Wir spinnen Luftgespinste Und suchen viele Künste Und kommen weiter von dem Ziel."* (Matthias Claudius)