

Something to hold onto in troubling times

Beloved person,

Last week, for a recording of the YouTube series De Ontmoeting (The Meeting)¹, I walked across a square in Apeldoorn with a large orange sign. The sign read: *Chance of spontaneous friendliness*. After finding the courage, and overcoming my hesitation, I started talking to passers-by about what was on their minds. In every conversation, sooner or later, the increasing harshness and tension in the world came up. I saw how this turmoil also invaded their personal lives, in a way that noticeably touched them. In conversation after conversation, feelings of powerlessness, incomprehension, amazement, anger, fear and discouragement emerged. In recent days - now that geopolitical tensions have risen even further - I have often thought back on them. How would they feel? And you? How do you experience these days?

How do you hold your own when, in practice, what you believe in and what you want to stand for is under so much pressure? When you are convinced that *all life stems from the same source*, that *you want to see every human being as equal* and that *the constant search for what connects us* is the right way? When *compassion, sustainability and solidarity*² are not just nice words, but the foundation on which you want to build? What does it do to you when these principles are challenged, when you no longer recognise them in what is happening around you, or even see them being pushed aside? How do you stay true to what is essential to you in a world that is sometimes so harsh and divided? How do you keep hope?

Hopefully you do not expect conclusive answers or interpretations from me. Personally, I don't feel like adding more words to the maelstrom of opinions. But I would like to tell you what gives the people I spoke to on the square something to hold onto.

One of them told me that he is practicing the art of 'looking closely': especially now. To keep a balance, he is always looking for examples of small goodness. To avoid negativity and cynicism, he consciously chooses to actively look for positivity. And apparently with effect, because he said with conviction: 'There are so many friendly people.'

Someone else shared with me that he hasn't watched the news or read newspapers for ten years and that his outlook has improved enormously. I don't think *burying your head in the sand* is the wisest advice, but it did teach me that you can choose when you do and when you don't immerse yourself in everything that happens in the world. It can help not to take in everything, always and everywhere.

“It gets better in the summer” is what a young market vendor believed with conviction. He meant this literally, but for me there is a deep truth and faith in his words. So is faith in God. For years we have been singing *‘I keep believing that good will prevail’*³, we tell each other stories about how the gentle forces will win in the end and we encourage each other with the thought that *‘most people are good’*⁴. This rock-solid faith must not waver now.

The last person I met was certain: “Big changes always start small.” By doing what you believe in and what you stand for. Not necessarily to change the world, but because this is the right thing to do. When everyone does this in his or her own environment, it goes further. ‘Because,’ she said, “our environments overlap.”

Perhaps you will find a perspective in one of these stories that gives you something to hold onto. And let us keep telling each other what you can hold onto, because that is perhaps more important than ever. We will have to push against the zeitgeist⁵ as hard as the zeitgeist pushes against us, *in order to cherish the light of love and to pass it on from generation to generation*.

With a warm-hearted greeting,

brother Marten van der Wal

We remember all those who are dear to us

¹ Able to be viewed from Sunday 9th March on apgen.nl/deontmoeting

² Freely taken from The foundation statement of our belief

³ Minke Slok-Zwaan: Community song no.128 ‘Find God’s strength’

⁴ Rutger Bregman: De meeste mensen deugen (Most people are good), De Correspondent B.V..2019

⁵ Zeitgeist: The spirit or general outlook of a specific time or period.