

Not shouting louder, but listening softer

Beloved person,

While watching and listening to the new - imaginative - films and animation¹ about the Holy Week, my thoughts suddenly turned to the people around Jesus. How uncomfortable it must have been for them to live with someone who constantly challenged the existing order, who did not shy away from discomfort, who went against the prevailing views, who sought confrontation and was prepared for conflict. No power or triumph, but an entry on a donkey. No cautious request to stop trading in the temple, but the decisive overturning of tables and thus also of certainties. Not being served, but washing the feet of his friends. No 'Father, punish them for what they do to me', but: 'Father, forgive them...'.²

This must have been too much for many people. Too confrontational. Too disarming. It caused so much discomfort amongst religious leaders, political powers and the people, that they rebelled. Not only in words, but ultimately also in deeds. He was seen as a threat, as a disruption of order, as too sharp, too real, too close. They chose for his exclusion, his humiliation and ultimately his crucifixion. The good that he embodied was not seen; there was no room for the good.

What would it have been like if they had been prepared to listen to each other openly? If they had allowed each other space for differences, for hesitation, for nuance? If all perspectives had been freely shared and the conflict had been allowed to exist? What would it have been like if they had remained curious about each other's inner world, and about what hopes, doubts or desires lived there? Perhaps then the 'Crucify him!' would have made way for: 'Speak again!'

Even now, we live in a world full of tensions and contradictions. Finding a way to deal with this is a great challenge. Sometimes still far away and easy to contemplate, but more and more often it gets a face and comes close by. I recognise the feeling that it is becoming too much and not knowing how to deal with it. And I also recognise that almost automatic tendency towards us-versus-them thinking: in true-not true, in left-right, in good-bad. Step by step, exclusion also lurks in me...

But I do not want to live like that!

Because I am Apostolic. I want to continue to believe that all life stems from the same source². You are me in a different form and therefore we are one. That makes you and me equal and that realisation calls on me to take responsibility to connect. Again and again.

Especially in Holy Week, we can reflect on the question of what ‘connecting again and again’ can look like. Not by convincing each other or avoiding disagreement, but by listening openly to the story *behind* the point of view, the experience *behind* the conviction, the fear *behind* the anger. Listening to understand. Not to win, but to really meet. To create space for differences, for multiple perspectives, for what both grates *and* enriches. It requires curiosity instead of judgement. To prefer conversation to discussion. To ask a question and share each other's inner world. And to build a bridge where there would otherwise be a wall.

Perhaps *that* is the movement of this week: not shouting louder, but listening softer³. Not shying away from difference, but seeing it as an opportunity for meeting, for new insight, for new perspective on the good.

And that does not start with the other. It starts with ourselves; again, and again. That is what serving as a model requires. Not out of habit, but out of faith.

With a warm-hearted greeting,
brother Marten van der Wal



¹ See: <https://www.apgen.nl/stilleweekfilm>

² See: The Foundation of our Faith

³ Abdelali Bentohami. *Het Parool* (Dutch newspaper) of 17 February 2025

On Sunday 13th April, the national Palm Sunday meeting will take place in Theater Orpheus in Apeldoorn, The Netherlands.

During this meeting we will also remember the sisters and brothers from our communities who have passed away in the past year.