

Bulletin No. 52 – May 2020



All church services and meetings online

Due to Corona crisis, all of our meetings are now online, e.g. the Sunday service on Sundays at 10:30. Our regular activities are listed here:

<https://www.ibc-bielefeld.org/activities/>

To fix potential technical issues, the online room for services will be opened 30 minutes earlier. For updates, you may join the Facebook group

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ibcbielefeld>

which is a private initiative of current and former IBC friends.

Bernd Winkelsträter

About Joy

My brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. (Phil. 3:1)

A Christian columnist tells us about a boy who would laugh so heartily and at ease when he, his duck on his lap, told about an incident with this animal. He laughed at the duck, no, that is wrongly observed, he laughed with the duck. How can joy transform in such wonderful ways!

Has that not been lost to us, such basic joy? Paul literally exhorts the Philippians: "Rejoice!" We lost something essential when we left our childhood. Only reason, worries and efforts remain. Much of our daily life – in Germany above all - is condensed into a problem and sometimes even a threat. Jesus called out to his disciples: "Where is your faith?"

According to Paul, he might as well have shouted, "Where is your joy?" Joy gives way in those moments when we lose sight of the greatness of God. Then, stealthily, this trust in him changes into clear directions for our own actions. Joy is a clear expression of our trust in a God who neither sleeps nor slumbers and who loves us through all the ups and downs.

It is a childlike trust that must not be lost to us, it rather wants to be lifted into our memory. There are many occasions for this, even if not all work out the same way. Deep below everything superficial, there is the joy in the Lord, a joy that is rooted in God alone.

The image of the duck and the boy reminds me, no, exhorts me not to forget joy, a centerpiece of Christian faith. Joy is ultimately a fruit of gratitude. Heartfelt, unconstrained joy is an excellent way to give glory to God. Paul writes that he does not lose heart to remind people of this again and again. He writes it so that the Philippians in their day as much as we in ours become all the more certain of this.

Stefan Prystawik

A life worth living

"For apart from me you can do nothing!" The words jumped out at me in a ladies' Bible study a few weeks ago. I realised how often I try to do things on my own, without the Lord's direction or strength.

As we read through and study John 15:1-17, we can see a picture of God the Father as a gardener and Jesus as the vine and we are his branches. From this passage we can see that the Lord's aim is that we bear fruit. He cuts off branches, even those who belong to Him, if they don't produce fruit. He prunes back others so that more fruit can be produced. And it is only by remaining in Him that we can produce any fruit. Jesus says that when we produce much fruit then we are His true disciples and this brings glory to the Father.

So what does Jesus mean by fruit?

In Galatians 5, Paul compares living by the sinful nature and living by the Spirit. The sinful nature produces actions that serve ourselves, satisfy our cravings, anything that is in opposition to God. We are told that the Holy Spirit produces a different kind of fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Fruit that grows internally within a believer, but has an impact outside of the believer on every relationship and how they treat people. I don't know about you, but for me, during this Corona lockdown time, it has been a time of pruning. Things I took for granted have been removed from my life and it has left me reconsidering where I have been seeking strength or comfort and what constitutes life. Although it is a blessing to have more time as a family, it is also stretching me to my limits of love, patience, kindness etc. Jesus told us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44), which can sometimes be those closest to us, when we don't see eye to eye!

As it then goes on to say in Galatians 5:24, those who belong to Jesus have nailed their sinful natures to Jesus's cross. They choose to die to themselves each day and live by the Spirit. Only then can we remain in Jesus. If we remain in Jesus's love, obeying His commandments, our joy in Him will overflow, as we sacrificially love one another as He first loved us. (John 15:9-15) This sort of fruit brings much glory to the Father.

And this sort of fruit doesn't just stay in families, although it needs to start there. It overflows out and affects every contact we have with people, at work (even when our work isn't valued as it should be), at church (even when we are hurt by others' words or actions), in the supermarkets (even when someone else gets the last packet of toilet paper), on the roads (even when we've been cut off by someone). As we allow the Spirit access to our hearts and lives, acknowledging that apart from Jesus we can do nothing, the fruit born by the Spirit in us will touch people's lives, showing them what Jesus is like and causing them to be thirsty for the God who loves them sacrificially. Jesus appoints us to go and produce lasting fruit, sacrificially loving people despite their sin and brokenness, that they would realise their need for Him and turn to Him in repentance and faith.

Katie Klein

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A better Home in Heaven

For various reasons, many of us left our homelands and moved to Germany. In a foreign country, we are confronted with challenges and problems on different levels, especially during the time of the corona crisis.

These challenges and problems usually lead us to miss our parents and project our inner longings for security and trust into our hometowns. "The moon is brighter in the hometown", said the Chinese poet Du Fu. The hometown indeed holds the most beautiful memories and fantasies of our childhood: the fields were still filled with our footprints; the big trees witnessed our growth day by day; the old houses still had our doodles; the air still echoed with our laughter. Hometown, what a beautiful place it is!

In the Bible we find Abraham, who once lived in the land of Ur and left home at the age of 75. At an age when most people want to return to their homeland, Abraham chose to leave his home country, not even knowing where he was going when he set out. He only knew that God would lead him to a new place where he could inherit a promised land. He responded to this call by faith and became a sojourner in a foreign land.

Abraham was a shepherd and lived an unsettled life, often moving because of the movement of his flock. Had Abraham thought of the hometown he had left, he would have looked for an opportunity to return. However, what he was longing for was a more beautiful home in heaven, which he saw not with his eyes, but in faith, for the God who called Abraham and made the promise have prepared a City for him. In fact, Abraham did not regret leaving his home, for what he had hoped for was a City with foundations, designed and built by God himself, a City that could not be shaken.

Abraham died at the age of 175, and at the time of his death he had not yet received what God had promised him, but had seen the City from afar, and rejoiced and was glad, and confessed that he was only a stranger in the world. Yes, Abraham saw one of his own descendants, the Lord Jesus, in faith. That is why Jesus said to the Jews, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." Abraham saw that Jesus would lead many sons and daughters into this City of foundations, into this more beautiful home in heaven.

In order to lead many of the children into the more beautiful homeland of that day, and because all the children were flesh and blood, the Lord Jesus took flesh and blood as well. The Word became flesh and dwelt in our midst, full of grace and truth. Because the children live in this world and face temptations of all kinds, he, like us, has been tempted in every way, but he did not sin, so that he is able to sympathize with our weaknesses, and know how to intercede before God for us.

Jesus Christ offered Himself only once to deliver all children from sin and death, thus leading us on that path to eternal life, that path to home. Once we sought a beautiful hometown on earth and we were far from God, now in Christ Jesus, by whose blood we have been brought to God. We are no longer outsiders and sojourners, but are one with the saints, one with the family of God.

Today we think not only of our hometowns, but also of our home in heaven, which is better and more beautiful. Those of us who think of this heavenly home are citizens of heaven and eagerly await the Savior who will come from heaven, the Lord Jesus.

Xianghui Zhang

Everlasting Arms

Our little grandson loves playing with water. On one occasion when he was staying with us, he wanted to help me with the washing up and would not take 'No' for an answer. So we stripped off his T-shirt, vest and jogging pants for I didn't have a spare set of clothes for him. He couldn't wait to let the fun begin. After about 15 minutes of washing all the plastic bowls and cups from the kitchen cupboards it was time to get dressed again, but this was not in his plan. I didn't really want to spoil his delight, but I could see that he was getting cold.

What followed was a ten minute struggle of epic proportions. You wouldn't believe how strong a two and a half year old could be. I tried to stay calm and talked to him softly while I managed to slowly fiddle him back into his clothes. In the meantime he tried to block every move while screaming and shouting that he did not want to get dressed again. The funny thing was that when I finally succeeded, he calmed down instantly all excited about his next adventure.

While I was holding my screaming grandson I wondered how God must feel when He has to stop His children in their tracks or even discipline them. We get an insight into His heart when we read Matthew 23:37. Here Jesus is lamenting over the people of Israel: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."

And even more, God extends his care to all people as He calls everyone into a relationship with Him. In Revelation 3:20 Jesus says: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."

And to all who come, He gives the right to become children of God (John 1:12-13). This is the God who is the Creator of all things, the Bible calls Him the Father, who holds everything in His hands; past, present and future and He knows what is best for His children and therefore (just like our earthly parents) will not always give us what we want. Although this is sometimes hard to accept, we can be sure that the everlasting arms will be holding on in all circumstances (Deut 33:27).

Elke Mottershead

Submissions to your Bulletin

The Monthly Bulletin of IBC Bielefeld is a platform aiming to create more formal church communications through writings. Submissions on original articles in the understanding of the Bible and Christian life including original book reviews and studies on specific biblical topics are welcome.

Please send your articles to:

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