

Sermon Service followed by AGM 18 July 2010
Subject: Pearls of Faith, Me- Pearl

Dear parishioners, dear friends of the Swiss Church

It is scientifically proven that people who meditate regularly are happier in life than those who don't. Isn't this quite an astonishing fact? One might ask how scientists can prove something, which is experienced in such a personal way? Recently a lot of research has been done in order to understand better what is going on in our brains. In the so-called neuroscience researchers examined the brains of Tibetan monks, who meditate several hours per day and they noticed significant differences between the neuronal connections in their brains and brains of normal people. As a result of this they could exactly make out why meditation increases one's well-being. But we don't have to go that far to learn that meditation has a positive impact on how we feel. Also in Christian faith we have a long tradition of meditation practice, especially in the Catholic Church, but also in the Protestant Churches. Recently a new idea has come up to introduce more people to a simple but still very thoughtful way of meditating. This idea is explained in this booklet called "Pearls of Faith" that has been invented by the Lutheran Bishop Martin Loennebo. Each of these pearls stands for a form of prayer and invites one to meditate on a certain theme. I have been preaching about two different pearls in two services beforehand: The pearl of God and the pearl of Silence and I will speak today about the third pearl, which is the "Me-Pearl".

When it is time to pray with this pearl we are invited to reflect on ourselves, about me. One might ask why we should be thinking about ourselves when we are meditating? Is meditation not all about concentrating on God? That's probably exactly the reason why the golden God's Pearl comes first and only after that we come to the "Me-Pearl" on the bracelet. But there must also be a good reason why the two pearls have been placed so closely to each other. The reformer John Calvin once said that we can only know God if we know ourselves. Calvin was truly someone who tried everything to understand who God is and still he realised that one can only find God if he finds himself. There is a lot of truth in that saying as we can only see God through our own eyes and therefore it is good to know with what kind of eyes we are trying to understand God. Therefore it makes absolutely sense to have a

pearl on the bracelet that concentrates on ourselves. So let us now discover some of the thoughts that we can ponder on when we meditate with the "Me Pearl".

One important aspect about that theme is that the Bible tells us that we human beings have been created in the image of God.

Genesis 1

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Does this verse allow us to assume that we have good reasons to think very highly of ourselves? Can we even consider ourselves to be similar to God? I doubt whether this is a very healthy thought, as all too often it seems that human beings are tempted by vanity. On the other hand there are many people who have an extremely low self-esteem and they struggle to think positively about themselves. For these people the words about being made in the image of God might be like balm for their souls. And it can help them to develop positive thoughts about themselves and as a consequence to have positive thoughts about the people they are dealing with. The Bible tells us that we should love our neighbour as we love ourselves. I believe we have to take the second part of this sentence as seriously as we do the first part. For in the end we can only love the others if we truly manage to accept ourselves. So it is not just optional to love ourselves but it is also a duty that one is challenged to work on. Praying with the Me-Pearl helps us to work on that very aim and to mentally build up a positive relationship with oneself.

For those of you who are maybe not so much the kind of person who likes to meditate I have good news there are other ways of getting to ourselves better. Today's Old Testament reading, which was about Adam and Eve's rejection from paradise, reveals us one other aspect on that way. Because Adam and Eve shared the forbidden fruit from the tree, they were not only expelled from Paradise but they also recognized each other and they felt shame before God and before each other. Even though this story certainly illustrates on one hand the disobedient behavior of human beings, it also shows very beautifully how delicately the relationships between humans and God, but also between the two human beings are being established. Because Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Wisdom they knew more than they were meant to know, but also they grew closer to each other because they recognized

each other as man and woman. Because they ate from that tree of wisdom they also got to know God better but thereafter they had to live separately from Him as a consequence. For me this story illustrates beautifully how these two human beings got to know each other better and through that also themselves as well as God. They realised what they were capable of doing and how easily both of them were seduced to eat from that forbidden fruit. They learnt the truth about themselves and God.

So one important way of getting to know ourselves better is by sharing our lives with others. And this is exactly one essential thing that we do as a church. We come together to help each other and to share our time and resources with each other. From time to time we may get on each other's nerves and maybe struggle with each other a little bit. And we may learn a few inconvenient truths about ourselves and about the people we deal with on that way. But that's all part of the experience of belonging to a bigger group or as in our case of being part of this church. The good thing about all of this is that through that sense of community that we experience here at the Swiss Church we also learn more about God and we learn more about ourselves. It is a process of growing and a process of gaining more wisdom. And hopefully it is also a process of being more and more capable of loving God, loving ourselves and loving our neighbours.

Amen