

Sermon 3 January 2010, Rev Nathalie Dürmüller
Subject: Watchword 2009 – What was possible in the past year
that seemed impossible? (Luke 18,27)

Dear parishioners,

Hopefully a happy and prosperous New Year lies in front of us. But of course none of us knows yet what the next year will bring. Some years bring happiness and success and other years are more of a challenging nature and they bring situations and circumstances that don't necessarily contribute to making us feel happy. We don't know yet what to expect of the coming year but we know how the last year has been. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to invite you to ponder on the past year 2009. To do so I will ask a few questions and after each question I'll allow some time for you to think about your personal answers. This exercise may help us to learn something from the past year and to start with fresh energy into 2010.

- If the last year were a movie of your life, what would the genre be? Drama, romance, adventure, comedy, tragedy, or a combination?
- What were the two or three major themes that kept recurring?
- What did you accomplish this past year that you are the most proud of?
- What do you feel you should have been acknowledged for but weren't?
- What disappointments or regrets did you experience this past year?
- (What were the major life-lessons you learned this past year?)
- Did anything happen in your or other people's life, which you thought was impossible to happen?

I wonder if anyone of you has an idea why I asked the last question? I asked it because I wanted to come back to the annual watchword of 2009, which is written in Luke, chapter 18, verse 27:

Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."

When I reflected on this question I realised that the finishing of the renovation of the Swiss Church building is a project that might

have seemed quite impossible at the time when the first ideas arose but now it has been made possible. I am sorry to bring up yet again the question of the church renovation, but for me personally and of course professionally this has been the most important event of the past year.

How important has it been for you?

I know that for quite a few of you this process of change has not always been easy. But I would like to challenge you with the following thought: What if this big renovation has only been possible because God has actually made it happen? Because he made the impossible to be possible. I don't want to insist that this is the case, as none of us really know the ways of God. We read in Ecclesiastes that His ways are often hidden from us human beings. So we humans should not claim that something has been or is God's will as we should be humble and not pretend to be in God's place. But looking back at the past year I somehow believe that this renovation had to happen and that it was possible in order to make our church flourish.

What else happened in the past year that seemed impossible at the time and *somehow* was made possible? I hope all of you have a story to tell. It might not be a spectacular story, but still something that is meaningful to you. Maybe a conversation that you had with someone, or a positive development in the progress of somebody's illness, or maybe someone who was supportive to you and helped you throughout the year, or something that you have learnt to do that you have never done before or someone who might have surprised you. I could suggest many more examples and I'm quite sure that you can now think of something that seemed impossible but became possible in the past year. I think that the key thing is that we start noticing these little things that happen in our lives and that we start appreciating them. Only if we have our sensors seeking for those unexpected things happening in our lives can we truly appreciate them.

There are also quite a few stories in the Bible, which from the today's point of view seem to be impossible or at least very unlikely to have happened. One example is the story about the Magi, known as the three Wise Men, who found Jesus' place of birth by following a glowing star. (Matthew 2,1-12). Today is the Sunday before the day of Epiphany and this story is therefore in the centre of our attention. What do you think of this story: Has it actually happened or not? Can God lead three men all the way

from the East to the little town of Bethlehem as it is told in Matthew chapter two? I want to leave this question open, as I don't think this is what really counts when we listen to that story. To me it is much more important to *believe* that God can actually make things possible, which seem to be impossible. And not only in the lives of Bible characters or very Holy people, but also in our personal lives. And this is especially the case when we think of the small achievements in our own lives. Certainly none of us is chosen to follow a star and only few of us - if any at all - might experience this sort of miracle in their lives. But does this mean that the impossible is not true or unlikely to have happened? I don't think so. On the contrary I believe that with a big portion of faith in God and trust in life we can achieve incredible things. Not everyone might notice but those close to us will notice and we ourselves will see our lives enriched and blessed, if we trust in life. What else do we need to see impossible things happen? We need the capacity to be open for new and courageous steps in our own lives and to encourage others in their lives to take those steps. Further, we need to learn to see when what seemed impossible has happened. It is only when we stop being open and when we stop seeing the good things that have happened that we actually don't experience them anymore. In this situation we are like stuck and every year seems to be similar to the past year. Therefore it is of prime importance to keep this ability to believe that the impossible can happen. If God wants us to live a life to its full than we should be open for what might be possible.

In this sense I wish us all an adventurous and blessed New Year.

Amen