

Sermon 21 March 2010

Subject: Holy Trinity Part II – God the Son, Genesis 22; Mark 15,20b-34

Dear friends of the Swiss Church

The two readings that we have just heard were actually quite brutal stories, don't you agree? First there was the story about the near sacrifice of Abraham's son and then about the sacrifice of Jesus - the Son of God. These two stories are often linked with each other, as they confront us with similar questions –the question of the sacrifice of a son. All of us are sons and daughters and some of us also have their own children or even grandchildren. Thinking of those relationships the thought of sacrificing one's daughter or son for faith as in Abraham's case or for love as in God's case is quite thought provoking. Have you ever asked yourself how this could make sense? Why was it necessary to have Jesus killed on the cross for our sins – was there not another way of reconciling the world with God? And why would God ask Abraham to do such a brutal thing as killing his most precious son that he had with Sara? For me these are most challenging questions – and I have to admit that I am far from having found an answer yet. Still it seems that this thought of sacrificing something or even sacrificing ourselves to achieve something is a thought that is part of human culture and probably part of each one of us. I think it is a strategy of survival. Only think of how many sacrifice themselves for their families, giving up many of their own wishes for the sake of others. Or think of how many sacrifice themselves for work in order to achieve something they are aiming for. In many cultures people sacrifice food or money so that the Gods may bless them because of that. So the idea of giving up something in order to achieve something else is not completely alien to us. Still for me it is difficult to accept the thought that God's only and precious son was sacrificed and that he had to die for *our* sins. On the other hand we have to take into account that at the same time with Jesus two other people were tortured to death on the cross. They were in a way sacrificed for society – as criminals they were seen as a threat for society and therefore according to the law they had to die. So why is for many of us the thought of Jesus' death so painful and so difficult to understand? One reason is certainly because we know from the Bible that he lead a very pure and exemplary life so there was no motive for him to die in such a brutal way. The other reason is that after his death he was recognised as the Christ, the long expected

Messiah, first by his disciples and then by many other people. So we primarily have to understand who he was for those who followed him and who he still is for those who believe in Jesus Christ today.

To evaluate the question we need to have a closer look at the term: **Jesus Christ the Son of God**. That's how we describe the second part of the Holy Trinity. This term describes the human and godly nature of Jesus at the same time. Jesus, the son of Joseph and Mary is the every day name that had been given to him by his parents. We can assume that for the first 29 years of his life he was more or less living the life of an ordinary person at the time. So the name "Jesus" describes his human nature.

Then we have the name "Christ", which comes from the Greek word "Christos" and means "messiah". Jesus had been recognised as the messiah by most of the people only *after* his death. According to the gospel of Mark the disciples were not allowed to speak about Jesus' godly nature. We read in chapter 8:

29"But what about you?" Jesus asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ. 30Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

Of course many Bible stories tell us a lot about Jesus' godly nature: the miracles he performs, the visions he has and how he speaks about and to God, which was in a way that no one before him had dared to address God. His words had a very striking authority. Nonetheless if we read the Bible texts carefully it becomes clear that mainly *after* his death, when he had appeared to His disciples, they start calling him "Messiah", or "Christ". Therefore it wasn't always clear for the disciples that he was the one who had been sent by God. Instead they needed faith to see in him the Messiah and of course for many of them this faith became even more real with the appearance of the resurrected Christ. This is the time, when the Early Church was born – at Easter when his disciples realised that Jesus was not dead but alive.

But it has to be said that the godly and human nature of Jesus was discussed in a very passionate way at the time. Different theologians were struggling with how to describe this phenomenon that Jesus was at the same time human and also Son of God, so of godly nature. So if we today have questions or doubts about what this all means then we are only in line with the first Christians. They had for example huge discussions whether Jesus had

already been born as God by the Virgin Mary or whether he had been adopted as the Son of God when he was baptised by John the Baptist. These were very fundamental questions that had to be decided and then formulated as a dogma, or content of faith, and which now form part of the Christian dogma of the Holy Trinity.

But besides the mentioned intellectual arguments, what does this all mean to us – why is it important that God revealed himself in a human being, in Jesus? The thought that the almighty God who has often been described as omnipotent and absent reveals himself in a human being who has to go through all the difficulties and pain which human beings can experience, is unique in any religion! I think that the thought that God becomes human and reveals himself in someone who is like us is a very powerful message, because it opens up the possibility for a very close relationship with God. This is a relationship that is not guided by fear and is not ruled by the law, but is a relationship that is based on love and trust.

So Jesus was one of us, but on the other hand wasn't at all like us – he was an ideal of a human being and someone we can look up to. The way that he lived and how he approached people from different backgrounds, still serves us as [a/the ideal?] role model. Therefore for me it is less important in which way and in what percentage Jesus was God and human. But what means more to me is that God reveals himself in an ordinary human being and that this human being is called Son of God which describes a very intimate and personal relationship with God. It is a spiritual relationship that every one of us can experience by the grace of God.

Amen