

Loviisan rauhanfoorumi » Blog Archive » Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan's Sermon for Loviisa Peace Mass

Bishop Younan in Loviisa Church, Finland, 8th August 2010. Picture: Timo Virtala

Living as the Children of Light

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you always.

It is a great privilege and honor for me to worship with you this morning.

I carry greetings to you from my church, the ELCJHL. We continue to be living witnesses in education, spiritual

work, diakonia, ecumenism and interfaith dialogue. We as Christians and especially as Lutherans have a role to play in the Middle East in reconciliation and interfaith dialogue. Although small in number, we continue to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments, advancing God's kingdom for Christians and non-Christians alike. We are encouraged by our Lutheran communion to continue our creative mission and prophetic diakonia. Please pray that Palestinian Christians may not lose faith and leave the country. For who wants to imagine the Holy Land where Christ walked without Christians?

Last month, Lutherans from all over the world gathered in Stuttgart for the Lutheran World Federation Eleventh Assembly. The theme of the assembly was, "Give us today our daily bread" (Matthew 8:8). This theme may seem simplistic, but as Martin Luther wrote in his Small Catechism, daily bread includes everything needed for this life. The message from the assembly puts it like this:

The sacramental sharing of bread and wine obliges us to care for the daily bread of our societies (1 Corinthians 11:17-34). As a communion of small and large churches, we recognize that we fulfill the obligation of feeding the world physically and spiritually in various ways, for instance through preaching the gospel, education and capacity building, social and political diakonia, advocacy and effective communication.

When we recognize that our prayer for daily bread means bringing justice in order that



others can pray for their daily bread, we are embodying what St. Paul says in Ephesians 5:8: “Live as children of light.”

What was in the mind of St. Paul when he admonished the Ephesians to “live as children of light”? As you know, the early church expected the second coming of Jesus to come quickly. St. Paul observes that his coming did not take place as people expected. His letter is to a congregation that was trying to mold its identity, to disengage itself from the past in order to live as Christians. Paul’s as well as John’s writing contain clear contrasts between the darkness of pagan life and light-filled life of Christians.

St. Paul’s words here are reminiscent of Jesus Christ’s, when he said, “The light is with you for a little longer ... believe in the light, so that you may become children of light” (John 12:35-36). This means a Christian is in communion with Christ, who is the light of the Christian. Through baptism the children of light become “participants of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

This is why our Lord and Savior admonishes his followers, “You are the light of the world. ... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14, 16) and St. Paul exhorts, “Live as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8).

It is the same challenge we face in our day. How can we live in this world and carry the light of Christ in us? This is the exact challenge that all churches and all Christians face daily. It is easy to intend to live in the light. But once we are confronted with a problem, are challenged by society or are tempted to enact revenge, we see that this noble teaching remains a far-fetched goal. Even so, with all our weaknesses, we are to live as children of light. Paul gives us a set of instructions: “The fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:9-10).

Some may tell me that Christians have gone through many events that have led us to be different from the believers in Ephesus in the time of Paul. It is true that movements like Reformation, Enlightenment, modernity and post-modernity have affected and shaped our Christian identity. But through all those movements and trends, the core question remained: How can we who are baptized in Christ live as children of light?

In these post-modern times, it is easy to label people as conservatives, liberals, ultraliberals, etc. Even Christians are categorized. I don’t pay much attention to all these labels, because what I care about is if we Christian live as children of light.

In days gone by, bolts of cloth were stacked in dark rooms. The merchant would pull out a bolt and hold it up to the light so the buyer could inspect the weave and check for blemishes.

In the same way, we Christians should stand in the light of Christ, so that we may see our flaws – our weaknesses, narrow-mindedness, judgmental attitudes and hypocrisy – so that

we might confess to the Lord that we have failed to live in his light. Such repentance will bring us back to our call to live as children of light.

One day as I was walking from my office in the Old City of Jerusalem to Jaffa gate, a merchant stopped me and drew my attention to a passing woman and child. He knew she was a Christian and that the handicapped boy she carried came from a Muslim family. He was amazed that she would give such motherly care to a child not her own.

I answered him, “Yes, as Christians, we are called to serve every human being, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, religion or political affiliation. We are called to be light. It is our witness and diakonia.”

We are to live as children of light – and let our light shine – not to draw attention to ourselves or because our salvation depends on us. Rather, we live as children of light because Christ, our light, has given us special gifts to share with the world. We may not be able to convert the world to Christianity. But we can secure the world by sharing God’s grace. We can secure the world by shining Christ’s light into the darkness. We can serve the world by loving each other and all humanity.

This is why the church must be prophetic. It must not only condemn sin but must dare to offer a vision of light to a dark world. It must take seriously the issues of the people she serves. It must embrace all of God’s people, the children of light.

And as the church is made of Christ’s followers, the church is also called to be light. That means that the church must not involve itself in a spirituality of escapism but in a spirituality that addresses human suffering and serves the world by being a light. Through witness and diakonia, the church is a servant, not a master, a carrier of the light and thus a living witness in every sphere of life. The church is to be light shining with the rays of faith, hope, love and forgiveness.

As members of the church, we are called refuse injustice and illuminate the world with God’s light of justice. We are called to work to eradicate poverty, to secure the right to food, to promote the full inclusion of women in society, to condemn human trafficking, to call for just sharing of natural resources, to counter climate change and, above all, to work for justice. We are children of light when we promote justice, forgiveness, peace and reconciliation. We are to be proactive in working to eliminate Islamophobia, xenophobia and antisemitism. In this way the church, the communion of the children of the light, becomes a beacon of hope in hopeless situations.

I sometimes ponder the fact that there have been Christians in Palestine since the first Pentecost. Now we Palestinian Christians are less than 1.5 percent of the population. According to recent studies by Bethlehem University and the Diyar Consortium, Palestinians are leaving the country for three reasons: difficulties caused by the political conflict, a lack of jobs and growing political and religious extremism.

Even so, Palestinian Christianity has survived 2,000 years. We have never ruled the country, nor were we ever in the majority. We do not have much property, power, money or influence. Yet we have survived. And I believe we will survive another 2,000 years. We have survived for the simple reason that we have carried the death and resurrection of our Lord in our bodies, souls and minds. Our strength has always been our witness, in spite of our weakness. The mystery of salvation keeps our hope and our living witness alive. By God's grace, we carry our light to the world and are ready to pay the price for this. This is why we do not focus on numbers but on the fact that our witness and diakonia are a light in our society. In spite of circumstances, we Palestinian Christians try to continue to be brokers of justice, instruments of peace, ministers of reconciliation, defenders of human rights including women's rights and apostles of love. I only pray that Christ the light may continue to call us for this holy task of being light in the world, accompanying our sisters and brothers in the world and in Jerusalem.

We ask you to hold us in prayer that God may continue to use us to be light. Pray that the political situation won't prevent us from being living witnesses and extinguish our light. As sisters and brothers in Christ and fellow light bearers in the world, we should together let our lights shine so that it might see Christ's light in us and glorify our Father in heaven.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Tags: [Christianity](#), [ELCJHL](#), [Gospel](#), [Israel](#), [Jerusalem](#), [Middle East](#), [Munib Younan](#), [Palestine](#), [Peace](#)

This entry was posted on Tiistai, Elokuu 10th, 2010 at 8:27 and is filed under [Loviisan rauhanforumi 2010](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can [leave a response](#), or [trackback](#) from your own site.