

## The Christ We Share...



Sisters and brothers,  
it all began at the beginning of Lent.  
My mother had just died.  
After one and a half years without a break I would try to take a few days off.  
And: I wanted to do something for Lent.  
I wanted to make a difference. I wanted to let something go. I wanted to leave the track of the busy daily routine and experience something new.  
Fasting was an option. Not to eat, but only drink. But would I manage with all the demands of everyday life? With the little sleep I get, and the physical strain I have through the caring for my paralysed son?  
Would I be able to fast? And what would I do instead of eating?  
In former years I would have gone for long walks instead of eating at mealtimes. I would have taken a day off to spend at the beautiful monastery of Schlehdorf in the mountains...  
But nothing like that works at the moment. With Nicolas at home I am housebound. I had to find something to make a difference to my routine that could happen within the walls of this house?  
I remembered that in former years I had taken great joy from painting – not in a professional way at all... But I had enjoyed the colours and what you could do with them.  
So, on the weekend before Ash Wednesday I went to the stationery shop round the corner and bought a great big piece of pretty strong cardboard. 90 to 60 square centimetres – a nightmare to carry home – but I did it.  
I also bought a new box of Jackson crayons, some golden water colour, carried it all upstairs into my bedroom.  
Yes – my bedroom – the only place in the apartment where I could work and leave my work as it suited me best. I wanted to be able to do bits and pieces whenever I felt like it, or just when an idea popped up.

I started fasting. And instead of eating meals, drinking a glass of wine in the evening and watching television, I focussed on this huge white blank space which was waiting for me to be filled with colour and given life.

I still cooked for the family, but when they actually ate the meals, I went next door and did bit by bit of my “piece of art”, my meditation cloth, my “Hungertuch” (=famine hanging or Lenten Veil)...

And I was of course very much inspired by the project with famine hangings in the Women’s Bible study...

I would now like to invite you to look at the colourful picture inside your bulletin (or at the big picture here on the altar) and go on a spiritual journey with me.

I started by pencilling a small heart somewhere near the centre of my huge blank piece of cardboard. I drew a spiral around it and made it wider and wider. I divided the spiral into fields and let it end in a sun that shines above a colourful garden with a cross. Cemetery or Golgotha – both in one. My mother had just died. And in the church year we were approaching Jesus’ last journey to Jerusalem that ended, as we all know, there on the cross. The grass, the flowers around the cross express the new life that can always come after times of death, fear and pain...

When the pencilling was done, I started unpacking my crayons. I hadn’t held any in my hands for a long time. It took ages to colour the whole white space, because that was what I had decided to do by then: colour it all and use the coloured space as the ground for the stories that I might come across in Lent. I had found this dreadlock Jesus and copied him. He reminded me of Nicolas, and helped me focus on the centre of my life: my faith, my church, my family...

I copied the graphics that had been the motives for my last few sermons... And I pushed all these images around the colourful background of my painting paper.

The Christ had to be near the heart. And I glued him on.

Coincidentally it now looks as if he was the other half of the big spiral heart that surrounds the small red one. And to be honest: for me this is a perfect match!

The spiral to me is an image of eternity... Love and Christ moving in the spiral – never ending, never to be stopped, sometimes closer, sometimes further away but always there and always able to make all things new...

So, when you start walking through my picture at the heart, you turn round it several times. And you come to the Christ figure that gives all our human love a focus and a purpose. Who would it be if not Christ who gives all human loving a reason and a direction? Who, if not Christ, fills our human heart with the love we need to love God’s world and care for its people?

Immediately after the Christ head in my spiral comes a picture of Wangari Mathaai. I found it in the newspaper one morning. And since I had just been reading the life story of this courageous Kenyan Nobel prize winner I decided to make her a companion on my journey: Wangari Mathaai and the trees, the attempt to recultivate forests and fertile land in areas of Africa that had over the decades been exploited and destroyed through monocultures and the sale of wood. Wangari Mathaai’s courage and commitment are adorable. Through hardships, misunderstandings, discriminations and personal attacks she’d now made it to be known worldwide for the Greenbelt movement, giving back trees to the African soil.

I painted some trees in gold. And since I had doubts one could recognize them as such, I wrote the word tree to go with them.

And down at the bottom left corner of the meditation cloth I wrote the words: “build houses, plant gardens” – taken from Jeremiah’s famous letter to the people of Israel in their Babylonian exile. (Jeremiah 29).

I had made my decision: I would connect what I’d read in the daily papers with my biblical knowledge and my Christian faith.

The next photo comes from war-torn Afghanistan. A father is holding and protecting his small child. A soldier armed to the teeth with a machine gun is standing in front of them. The picture went under my skin. The words I had to add to it are the words Jesus spoke to his disciples, when he showed himself to them after his resurrection. “Peace be with you”, (John 20:19).

...and peace be with the father and the child and the soldier. Peace be with the people of Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq. Peace be in Haiti and Chile. Peace be in all the trouble spots and battle fields of this world.

Peace be with you!

If we follow the spiral down from the picture of war, we come to a woman in prison. Our way leads us past a sign for peace and the words freedom and dreams to a heart with wings. Love and freedom in one image. The woman in prison next to it dreams of them: love & freedom. And she reminds me of Jesus who asks us to visit those in prison, because by visiting them we meet him. “I was in prison, and you visited me...” (Matthew 25:36).

Maybe this woman has children – somewhere outside the prison. Children she’d love to show her love to. ...children who have the right to experience the joy and fullness of life.

And here Jesus comes along and says “Let the children come to me (Mark 10:14) and do not stop them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these...”

The kingdom of God also belongs to all those who don’t always get it right.

On our journey through my picture there now comes a graphic of the New Testament story of the woman caught in adultery.

Can you recall it? The morning in the temple? Jesus sitting quietly, crowds already pressing in on him again? And all of a sudden scribes and Pharisees dragging this poor woman in front of Jesus – hoping to get rid of her and him? And do you remember what Jesus does? He keeps quiet, bends down, and writes on the ground. And eventually he stands up and says his famous words to the woman: “Has no one condemned you? Neither do I condemn you. Go now and from now on do not sin again.”

Whatever her life had looked like before, she is now invited to change it altogether and enter a future full of promise and hope. And this is exactly what I wish for the three women whose photos I’d found in the paper the other day. They look astonished, shocked, in pain. Fear is written in their faces... despair... May they be able to turn around, walk away and start anew...

From the woman caught in adultery our journey leads on to Martha and Mary: those two sisters who in their togetherness can save the world. But if they hold a grudge against each other and are unable to cope with each others’ diversity, the atmosphere of their home and their world is poisoned. Jesus invites his two friends to – at the right moments in life – choose what is good. And he invites us, too. Choose what is good. It can be many different things at many different times. (Luke 10:38-42).

Almost unknown is the passage “...there were also some women, Mary and Joanna the wife of Chuza, ... Susanna and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.”

Mary, Joanna, Susanna and others... Jesus was not only surrounded by 12 male disciples, but by many others, too – and by women.

We have no names, nor faces, but in my collage I did give them faces. Then and now women were and are supporting the Jesus movement. Women and men are spreading the Gospel and doing countless good things in the name of their God.

In my meditation cloth you can see a graphic of Jesus surrounded by women, and then the photos of women from all over the world taken from the daily newspapers.

If we start at the top left, next to the dove of peace – you can see an Arab woman together with others putting down roses at a concrete wall. They are protesting peacefully against the bombing of their settlement through the Israeli military airplanes. I coloured the rose in gold.

Next comes an African woman. Beautiful and happy. And as to show that with her cultural background she has something to bring to the rest of the world, I painted her head scarf in gold.

Next to her is an old white lady from a British newspaper. The report is on a vast peace demonstration. It is cold, she is wrapped in layers of clothes, holds a coffee-to-go in her hand and sits on a folding chair. She among lots of young demonstrators has never given up the dream of peace and disarmament; and despite her age she still demonstrates this publicly. I have added a golden peace symbol to her picture.

On the left-hand side, in the middle row of these women's pictures we can see an indigenous Bolivian woman marching for peace across a plaza in the capital of her country so torn apart by corruption and drug trafficking. To emphasize her origin and her right to own land and dignity, I gave her traditional clothes some golden lines.

In the next picture the rosary is coloured in gold. Russian mothers hold it up in front of the Kreml palace in Moscow to protest against the brutality and abuse their sons are exposed to in the Russian army. May their faith strengthen these bold women, and give them back their sons safe and sound.

The following photo shows a young African woman with a baby. There is a broad smile in her lovely face. And the baby is sleeping peacefully. I simply painted a golden sun to shine on them: not the sun that dries out and burns, but the sun that warms and sustains. The sun that makes life brighter and speaks of resurrection...

On the bottom line of the right-hand side there is a European school girl in a classroom. And I painted some golden birds above her head and against the blackboard to indicate how important it is to be free to think what you like to think... to dream, to develop and grow!

...and to speak up! Shown on the next photo: a black woman with a microphone in her hand: self-confident and brave. She has got something to say. And what she says may make a difference for many – who knows.

Before we come back to “the women around Jesus”, we see the picture of an Indian woman doing a computer course. To point out her background, I coloured the spot on her forehead in gold. Education is so important, know-how and professional skills. They can change the lives of people totally, if they are only given the chance to undergo teaching and training!

All these women were and are helping to support – the work that has begun with Jesus 2000 years ago, and that can never be stopped before not every individual human being can live his or her life in freedom and peace.

May we join hands with them, and may we - as they are – be inspired by the idea of peace in this world, expressed by the big white dove flying out of the photo of a peace demonstration, moving through the night sky, and almost feeding these women with courage and faith.

On the left side of the photo of the peace demonstration comes the sun. It shines on the words “his mother made him a little robe”, and refers to the Old Testament story in which Hannah makes a robe for her son Samuel every time she visits him in the temple. (1 Samuel 2:18&19). The little robe stands for the love and care of a mother who gives all she can give to her beloved child. The photo which reminded me of Hannah and Samuel is from a newspaper article on Indian mothers in a cooperative trying to make a living on their own. Independence from husbands, fathers, brothers and the restrictions of a male-orientated society can be reached by giving the women economic freedom and an existence of their own – starting with a sewing machine.

I've put a little robe in the centre of the photo because I strongly believe that the skills of mothers can become the turning point for the future of their children!

The next picture – at the top left of the meditation cloth - shows the people of Haiti after that horrendous earth quake some weeks ago. They are sitting there, hundreds, thousands, with their bowls waiting to be filled.

And what immediately came to my mind is the sentence Jesus spoke to his disciples when they were faced with the hungry crowd whose story ends with the feeding of the 5000. (Mark 6:30ff). “Send them away,” the disciples say, “so that they can get some food.” And Jesus responds simply: “You give them to eat.”

He said that to his disciples then, and he says it to us now: you give them to eat...

...those who hunger for bread, for respect, for acceptance and welcome and dignity and and and... You give them to eat!

One morning in those days in which I fasted, Titilayo's photo was in the paper. Dancing and singing, she reminded me of Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron. (Ex 20).

Miriam sang courageously for the people after they had survived the floods of the Red Sea and the attempts of the Egyptian army to bring them back into captivity.

The joy over liberation and freedom had to be expressed in song and dance. And finally all the women joined Miriam and helped fill the air with music and hope.

... maybe their song could still be heard in Jesus' day. Do you remember the story when this desperate Canaanite woman insisted on Jesus healing her daughter?

Do you remember how she met Jesus? How she begged and pleaded? How he tried to ignore her at first? How the disciples wanted to send her away? How she plucked up all her courage and stayed – arguing brilliantly and making Jesus change his mind? (Matthew 15:21).

Do you remember how in the end Jesus said to her: “Woman, you have great faith. Your request is granted.”

And then comes this famous sentence: and her daughter was healed from that very hour...

This story of a brave mother who fights passionately for the life of her child came to my mind the morning, when I saw the photo of this woman from Nepal carrying the infusion of her child on a simple wooden stick. Life saving medicine in one hand and the child in the other, and this all day long. What determination she shows, what power over the unfairness of life, what great love, and what admirable faith!

On my meditation cloth her way leads into the bright sunlight. The sun on Easter morning shining over the darkness and pain of the crosses of this world. No suffering, no harm, no pain, no death that could not be penetrated by the resurrection in which we all believe.

At the foot of the cross grow flowers... blossoming against all that threatens and destroys life. Against the nuclear power plant, I set Jeremiah's words of building houses and planting gardens. And the cross is not the end of our journey, because when we walk or look past it, we can see Mary of Magdala in front of the empty tomb. Flowers grow where she stands. And the message she has for all people then and now, is: "I have seen the Lord...", and she told them what he had said to her.

"Come to me", the risen Christ says in our meditation cloth. Come to me. Travel with me. Meet me. See me. Follow me.

On our spiritual journey we can focus on the dreadlock Christ again, on the love that comes from him. And if we like, we can walk the whole way again.

When I had arrived at this point in my days of fasting, I went through the pictures one more time. I added words in gold that express my life of faith. And here you can read: freedom and dreams, joy and love, pain and tears, knowledge, bread, peace and care, food and music, determination and resurrection, and just before you meet the Christ head again: happiness. There may be more, many more, but those are the ones that shaped my weeks of Lent. It was an extraordinary experience of connecting my faith, my life, my biblical knowledge with the news from the outside world that reaches me on the television news and in the newspapers every single day.

My life of faith has a lot to do with the stories of the people of this earth. And I think I have only just begun seeing them all together and connecting the biblical then with the 21<sup>st</sup> century now.

The title over all is simply and merely: the Christ we share.

The Christ we share in everyday life.

I did find him, and he filled my life with a peace and a sense of fulfilment that I had never before experienced.

May my adventure with stories and colours be an eye opener to you as it was for me & my family: to see the world and what happens in it more closely connected with God and the Bible than you did before,

because the world is always waiting for your touch and your tenderness.

So, go with courage into the costly path of Christ,

go with imagination into the creative life of God,

and go with freedom into the life of the Spirit.

Amen.