

## **Unity in the midst of diversity – Sermon on Ex 2: 1-10**

Unity – in the midst of diversity.

Unity – in spite of diversity.

Unity – as the only way to make the world a better place.

Sisters and brothers,

if we look at many of our Peace Church liturgies and if we look at the liturgies for the Women's World Day of Prayer of the last few years, these are the thoughts and themes we come across over and over again.

On Friday evening we celebrated the Women's World Day of Prayer service once more at Peace Church. We've been doing it all these years that I have been here. So, at least nine times – maybe more...

For over 40, and in some countries over 50 years on every first Friday in March women in every corner of the world come together to pray. Every year women from one country of the earth prepare the liturgy for the service, and then offer it to the rest of the world to be translated into I don't know how many languages. Women everywhere come together, invite others and pray for the world. This is something very special and unique! And celebrating this service in different countries of the world, also in different languages, is a very precious part of my life story. It connects me with Christians of other times and places. And it will always remind me of sisters and brothers who I celebrated with years ago and far away.

I treasure this Friday evening in March, and find it worth making known even more.

That is why I chose the readings from Friday night as the readings for today's service – in which we baptised one baby and welcome another... And we are all working together to make a difference in their lives.

The women from Papua New Guinea who prepared the Women's World Day of Prayer service 2009 chose two pieces of Scripture.

One from Romans 12 and one from the book of Exodus.

(Romans 12:4-13 & Exodus 2: 1-10).

The combination of the two comes as a kind of surprise.

But when we take a closer look at them, we notice that they both – as in the years before – have a strong emphasis on unity.

Behind the choice of those texts must be a strong and heartfelt desire to overcome all that separates people and keeps them apart from each other: boundaries, languages, social backgrounds, political systems, denominations and religions.

The liturgy we used on Friday evening speaks to us of a deep human desire for harmony and peace. Something we all long for, here at Peace Church, but also in the whole world, and especially in Papua New Guinea where the authors of the Friday evening liturgy live.

Just imagine: Papua New Guinea is a country with 800 different languages, and a landscape so bizarre and wild that many parts of the country are simply so rough that you cannot pass through. Roads, paths, bridges that could connect

people are missing. And since the different people don't meet each other to have a chance to get to know each other, there is a lot of dangerous hostility and passionate rejection of anything and anybody that is strange, unknown, foreign and new.

***(Examples of women in Papua New Guinea from the WWDP booklet)***

Women of the Christian churches in Papua New Guinea understand that their home country can only achieve peace and progress by working together – by overcoming natural, ethnical and spiritual barriers and trying to speak one language: the language of love. The Bible texts they invited us to reflect upon Friday night, and which I invite you to think about again today are a call to working in unity.

One body and many members is one.

It is obvious.

The other one is the story about baby Moses in the basket... a story well known to many of us. It is a story of women ( and why not focus on this today, since it was not only the WWDP on Friday, but it is also the World Day of Women today...). So, our story is a story of women, and in the centre there is a male child who with his actions will one day change the future of a whole nation.

The story is all about power and threat, about courage and determination, about wisdom and awareness, and over all about solidarity.

Since the time of Joseph, the Israelites had been living in Egypt. Valued workers at first, slaves later... a threat to a Pharaoh who feared that the foreign people could outnumber his own people and oppress the Egyptian population.

Crazy, - but once he'd got that thought in his head, there was only one way out: oppress and wipe them out as fast and as effectively as possible. All male babies were to be killed...

Two brave midwives are the first to oppose the evil plan. They saved as many babies as they could, and questioned by the Pharaoh get away with courageous and bright responses...

Moses' mother had managed to hide her little boy for 3 months. But then it became more and more difficult. She sought a way out and did the absolutely unusual: she placed her child in a basket and left child and basket in the Nile... the famous river of Egypt... the giver of fertility and water and growth to the country and the people.

To make the mother's plan work, the story needed more people to take part in it. The sister of the baby boy comes on stage, the daughter of the Pharaoh, and her servants.

The Egyptian princess – obviously a childless young woman – takes her bath in the Nile. The sister of the baby in the basket observes what is going on from afar. She is the guardian for her little brother without being noticed. The princess only notices the basket and the baby.

She sends a servant to get basket and baby. And she immediately has motherly and warm feelings towards this helpless little creature.

No thought that this could be one of the babies her father would not want to live... even though she seems to assume that it can only be a Hebrew baby. It doesn't matter to her. She wants this child; and she wants this child to live and grow.

So when a young girl approaches her with the offer of a wet nurse to take care of the baby the princess agrees to the arrangement at once.

Whether she knows that this woman who comes to breast feed her new baby could be the boy's real mother? We don't know...

What this leads to in the end is: that the princess of Egypt pays a Hebrew mother to feed her adopted baby. And the irony lies in the fact that the princess herself has her father's future opponent raised in their own palace...

The summary of it all is: three women come together to care for a child that actually is not supposed to live. They overcome the boundaries of language, religion and social status in order to save this little life.

Three women have the courage to overcome boundaries, take a risk and do the unusual:

a mother entrust her child to the water of the Nile that can bring both: life or death.

A daughter risks staying close by and approaches the daughter of the Pharaoh.

And a princess ignores the cruel and inhuman command of her kingly father and adopts this foreign little thing...

Three woman – one road.

Three women – one aim.

Three women – one action.

Unity in diversity.

The text of the women in Egypt shows us what it means to act together... and how such togetherness can make all the difference. Looking at the story in the light of strangers working together to save life, there is not better story for the women in Papua New Guinea, and for just everybody in this world who hopes and prays for a future of all humankind in justice and in peace.

The women of Papua New Guinea add to the story of those three OT women the other passage of the many members who are one body in Christ. Paul calls Christians of all times and places to unity. The image of the body with many members reminds us that we all can only truly live if we work together: each at his or her place with the individual and diverse gifts given to us.

And here the message chosen in Papua New Guinea reaches right into the heart of Peace Church.

We are encouraged to help each other, to reconcile and forgive, to welcome, accept and respect each other. We are asked to show to the world what God can do with the lives of people who have the love, the passion and the courage to embody the body of Christ in this world.

In Papua New Guinea women, especially, are contributing to finding solutions to almost unsolvable political situations.

At Peace Church everybody is constantly challenged and challenging others to overcome boundaries, differences, fears and inhibitions.

The women in Papua New Guinea show adorably that faith in Christ can enable people to realize unity in the midst of diversity. They take their courage from their OT role models: three women around the baby in the basket.

Let's do that, too...

70 or more church members around a common dream:

living unity in the midst of diversity, living unity in spite of diversity, living unity as the only way to make the world a better place.

Amen.

### **Prayer**

We thank you God, for directing our lives and teaching us the language of love and unity. As your people, united and one in your body, with your love and your power in us, we all can be instruments for peace and reconciliation – here and everywhere. Fill us with the courage and determination, with the wisdom and awareness, and over all with the solidarity of the women around Moses. And although we know that as Christians we cannot change the world in one go, we ask you to set our hopes on performing small signs and making small differences in the places you are sending us to – in Jesus name. Amen.