



Bishop's Post October November 2017

Jesus says: I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! (Luke 12, 49)

“Brother Martin, how long did it take you to write those 95 theses? When you mailed them to your superiors, what were you thinking? By the way, did you write each copy yourself, or did you have students to help you?

As you handed the letters to the messengers, you were hoping for reaction - that the superiors would agree and forbid the practise of selling forgiveness. It seems as if your superiors did not really give your letters much attention. But some of your letters fell into the “wrong” hands, and soon people far and wide were discussing your statements.

These 95 theses started a fire that would sweep across Europe at an enormous speed. They led to bloodshed, division, and the break up of your church into many, many churches.

Brother Martin, did you realise what you were doing?” I wish I could ask him that!

Martin Luther was concerned that repentance had been commercialised, that it was becoming a transaction with no repercussions but financial ones, leaving the penitent poorer and the church richer. But when Jesus said: Repent, he did not mean to just compensate for wrongs of the past, but that the whole life of a Christian is one of repentance, of turning to Christ and living a new life. (Thesis 1)

The 95 theses were written 500 years ago. Still there are preachers that sell salvation. Still there are many Christians that confess their sins but do not dream of changing their life style. But since then the Church has split into thousands of denominations, and it continues to break up even more.

Did Jesus mean this when he said in Luke 12, 51 that he did not come to bring peace but division? Is this the fire that he was yearning for - a fire of destruction - devastating like the recent Knysna fires? Does he rejoice each time a church splits and families get torn apart for religious reasons?

This portion of Luke 12 can indeed create the impression that it is OK, even biblical, to split a church, to excommunicate those who do not follow my doctrines. But the beginning of Luke 12 makes it clear that Jesus is not speaking about a divided Church, but telling his disciples that the spreading of the gospel will cause tension because this gospel of salvation is not liked everywhere. He prays that this gospel will spread like fire, that it will not be held up by resistance, that people all over the world will be set free by it. And in John 17 it becomes clear that Jesus wants this fire to spread through Christians that work in unison.

On 27 August 2017 six Lutheran Churches joined in a combined Service in Pretoria, celebrating the Reformation. It is the first time in 200 years that this happened in our country. That is sad. But it did happen. That is good!

What the world needs now more than ever is this message that Christ transforms lives. It does not need theologians condemning each other, but Christians together proclaiming this powerful message. We proclaim Christ who calls to repentance, who forgives us and then sends us out to live a different life, a life of blessing.

When we celebrate 500 years of Reformation we do not look back with nostalgia, but get courage to move forward, to clean up the mess of inner-Christian fighting and proclaim that Christ is Saviour. This is the fire that we should kindle!

Horst Müller

News from the Church

After passing their final exams at the end of July 2017, **Martin Büttner** was ordained on 14 August in New Germany, where he now is serving as Pastor-coll. **Martha Weich** is serving as Pastor-Coll in the Eastern Cape Inland Parish (Stutterheim). We thank the Lord for guiding them all these years and trust that they will have a blessed ministry.

On 10 September 2017 **Pastor Wilko Hunger** was inducted as pastor of the Northrand congregation in Johannesburg. He and his wife Jutta arrived on 25 August - just in time to attend the All Lutheran Service on the 27th! We wish them a speedy settling in, and a blessed time in their new congregation!

Feedback from the **ELCSA (N-T) Synod in Hermannsburg** will come at a later stage, since this newsletter was written before the Synod took place. All information regarding synod, including the Church Council report, can be found at <http://www.elcsant.org.za/synod-2017.html>