



SIEBENQUELL

»Awake, Lyre and Harp!«

Advent Singing



SOURCE: CHERRY LAITHANG@WWW.UNSLPASH.COM

»Oma, is it evening already?«, my three year old granddaughter asks repeatedly during the afternoon in these weeks. While I try to explain the difference of the length of a day in summer and in winter, I think to myself Indeed, the night is long and is currently growing longer.

The Jesuit Friedrich von Spee lived through a long »night time«. In this time the Thirty Year War was raging, as well as the witch-hunts, which weighed heavily on him. And repeatedly the plague wiped out many people.

He was deeply aware – and people of all ages know this – of what Isaiah spoke: »The people who live in darkness . . . who live in the land of deep darkness, . . .« (Isaiah 9). Martin Buber translates it this way: »The people, who walk in darkness. . . the settlers of the land of death shadows«. What darkness enveloped and envelops peoples of all ages: the darkness of personal strokes of fate, disorientation, illnesses, epidemics; the darkness of injustice and atrocities, of war and oppression, of hunger and being displaced. How dark is our sight when the very foundations of life threaten to be lost!

Friedrich von Spee shows us the way how we can move through such times without letting ourselves be ruled by the severity and perhaps paralyzed by it. He writes songs, indeed, he sings!

One of his most famous songs is an oft sung Advent carol:

O Savior, tear the heavens wide!
come down from heaven to abide!
The gates of heaven tear away;
break down where locks and bars hold sway!

O God, in heav'nly dew pour down,,
in dew, O Savior to us flow!
O clouds, let fall and bring in rain
a King o'er Jacob's house to reign!

Friedrich von Spee experiences such a great, comprehensive darkness, that only a tearing open of the heavens can bring salvation. It takes divine power and strength to break down locks and to make a glimmer of light visible once more. The time is pressing and the need is great, the saviour should make haste, indeed, run. A tenderness of God is needed, the »dew« that gives the elixir of life. Yet, he cannot drip into such distress, no, he must flow and hasten to bring the saviour. Spee has the plea and the vision that the dark clouds break open and the rain of salvation pour down, the true king of his people.

He turns his great concern and this firmly grounded hope into a song – not a song for distraction or to raise our spirits. This song is directed toward God; it does not deny reality, but it speaks of hope and visions founded on the experiences of the People of God in ancient times. It is never a matter of giving up on earth in the face of such distress and severity or of merely protesting. No, singing gives the strength to endure and carry on. Spee himself dies in 1635 at the age of 44 while ministering to a plague victim.

He left us a treasure and a wisdom: Sing in the dark in order not to lose courage! Sing of that which carries you, so that you do not lose hope! Go with God, sing loud and long, rejoicing and pleading, weeping and seeking!

Can we today, in our over-lighted, blinking Advent sing like that? Do we practice that and to we practice Advent living in order to experience with Isaiah: »The people that dwell in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.« (Is 9, 1)

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Vallendar, December 6th, 2019