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Healing has never grown out of hardness



During conversations or in spiritual direction, I remind people of a life lesson from the biblical stories: Healing has never grown out of hardness. Self-flagellation, reproach, anger and every other form of hardship produces even more hardship. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth does not produce justice, but merely increases the number of wounded.

We are currently experiencing a great deal of hardship in the world. Wars are raging not far from our borders that are not coming to an end, but instead are escalating. All over the world, we hear the voices of hardness that want to ban foreigners, call for intolerance, shout hate slogans and stir up fears, combined with an ever-increasing willingness to use physical violence. The tone in society and in the church is becoming harsher and harsher. This is justified as necessary to push through reforms, achieve political goals, defeat enemies, defend one's homeland, cherished habits or ideologies or simply to defend oneself. However, no healing comes from this.

The biblical narrative does not deny that there are life experiences that are difficult to endure. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus says this very directly. »But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,

and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. « (Mark 13: 24-25). But Jesus loves hope, not fear in this hour. His advice is this. »From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.« (Mark 13:28)

We should learn from the fig tree. When its branches become tender and the leaves sprout, we know that summer is near. Jesus takes us to the school of plants, because the laws of the spirit and the deep laws of reality coincide. Every sprouting ensures that life triumphs over death.

We should learn from the wisdom of the trees: when the branch becomes tender ... the softening of the branch, which we cannot even imagine in winter; its softening for the sap that makes the small canals swell again, is a surprise and an ancient wonder. We don't have to look for the most beautiful things, we must wait for them. Like the spring that brings us summer. This movement from hardness to softening is a constant experience of the biblical stories. Again and again, we move from experiences ripe with a lack of redemption to new dawns of redemption. Where apathy has a firm grip, there is a softening towards love and empathy. Fears soften into freedom, loneliness into community and the boringly ordinary into the astonishingly unusual. The diabolical, which throws everything into disarray, becomes tender and softens into peace. The daily grind softens, and we find ourselves once again able to enjoy and even celebrate life. Barrenness gives way to blossom. Where we have not worn the wedding garment for a long time, we soften and reappear in the wedding garment, the biblical symbol that we are ready to do what the hour demands of us.

That is why Jesus also says in this situation: »Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.« (Mk 13, 31) His word will not make us harder, but will soften us. Do we hear words today that awaken this in us? Where are such words spoken? Who speaks these words to us? This is how we can follow the trail of God even in times of barrenness.

»But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.« (Mark 13: 24-25). The sun, moon and stars will pass away. They are the great images of external orientation. We orientate ourselves spatially by them. Navigation is made possible by them, because if I know where the sun rises and where it sets, I also know where east and west are. If I find the North Star, I know where north is. Seas and deserts can be navigated and crossed when we see the stars, but also a horizon, the place where heaven and earth meet. However, all this will pass away.

In terms of time, we can orientate ourselves to the sun, moon and stars. They enable us to recognise dawn and dusk, the times of day and to distinguish day from night. Those who can see stars are also able to cope with the dark times: »Sentinel, what of the night? Sentinel, what of the night? The sentinel says: Morning comes, and also the night.« (Is 21:11-12) However, all of this should also pass away. The sources of external guidance will fail at some point.

»But my words will not pass away.« The words of Jesus, like the words of God, are the source of inner orientation. They do not fade away, even in the dark, difficult days of external disorientation.

From the softening of a branch, we learn the future of God: that he stands at the door and knocks; he does not come as an admonishment, but as an embrace, as the sprouting of life. As Romano Guardini put it so beautifully: »The whole world is a germinating reality«. This reality of germination only succeeds when we become tender and soft again. And that is why it remains true for us: Healing has never grown out of hardness.

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