John 12:22-30; ‘Passiontide begins (- Lent 5 = Passion Sunday))

As Easter is approaching - death and resurrection of Jesus Christ......

Helmut Richard Niebuhr (one of the most important Christian theological ethicists in 20th‑century USA) wrote on the issue of liberal theology in the late 1930-ies - ‘A God without wrath brought men without sin into a Kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a Cross.’

Niebuhr wrote it against the liberal theology, but in this day and age could we not use the same words against a misinterpreted ‘God is Love’ theology?

We’re now so much focussing on the love of God in this day and age, that we easily forget the reason why we can speak about a God of Love.

Presumably we all know the famous verse of John 3:16 - ‘For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.’

Unfortunately, many have forgotten :18 thereafter which says: ‘Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already.’

In an image of God as only Love it becomes very difficult to leave any room for condemnation. But, if we do not want to hear anything about condemnation, or want to see ourselves and all people in a state of condemnation, the words from Niebuhr become so true again: A God without wrath brought men without sin into a Kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a Cross.

Lent course.... what does resurrection means and what do we believe about our own resurrection, but I was surprised about the answers given. Quite a few did see the resurrection as a kind of spiritual resurrection and had no further thoughts about it. When we talk about eternallife, what life do we anticipate?

John 12:25 is a key text in our reading this morning when Jesus says: The one who loves his or her life will loose it, but the one who hates life will win it for eternity. The same text with similar wordings is also found in Luke 9:25 and Matthew 10:39.

Jesus speaks here about life for eternity, but what is it? Is it something spiritual like hinduism which believes people will go back as particles into the divine universal being.

What is life? The words in :25 might raise some questions, but need some nuance and this begins with a closer look into what Jesus means with ‘Life’.

In the original Greek text of John 12:25, the word used for life is the so called psuche or soul. But, we have to be careful here, because the psuche as soul has a Greek philosophical meaning and not a Hebrew one. Jesus was not a Greek, but a Jew and the Jewish philosophy was not the same as the Greek philosophy.

We can be quite sure that Jesus spoke Hebrew, or Aramaic which is a Hebrew dialect, so He used words expedient to His hearers. But, John, Matthew and Luke, writing their Gospel, used this Greek word psuche to explain what Jesus meant when He spoke about life.

The word psuche is not alien to the Hebrew or Jewish people. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, the word psuche is not uncommon.

When used for people the word psuche denotes a kind of life principle driving action of every type. We often call it the soul, but the soul in Jewish thinking means the whole human being in its entirety including all responsibilities. Someone's soul is therefore someone’s self, and it denotes the living person in thought, decision and action.

Later rabbinic teaching declares the body from earth and the soul from heaven and the soul dwells in the body like a guest, leaving the body at death. Then at the resurrection, body and soul are reunited and forms a unity again standing in responsibility to God.

A Rabbi's parable about 150AD puts it this way: When a blind man puts a lame man on his shoulder and both steal the fruits in an orchard, both are judged simultaneously; in the same way body and soul will be judged together.

When Jesus speaks about life He means a state of consciousness and being. Life is how we are in our personalities, created in the Image of Demut of God. Each of our own consciousness, actions, thoughts and all what drives us.

When we think about the resurrection in the light of the words of Niebuhr again: ‘A God without wrath brought men without sin into a Kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a Cross.’ Body and soul belong together and what we’ve done with our bodies is never to be disconnected from our self with each of our own thoughts, decisions and actions.

The resurrection is therefore much more than a spiritual something, because it is about who we really are without sin, because we are redeemed by the Blood of Christ through faith.

In the passion of Christ and through faith we rephrase the words of Niebuhr; A God of judgement, brings people of sin into His Kingdom because the condemnation has been carried by Jesus on the cross.