

# HELIGA TREFALDIGHETS DAG

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Predikan av Bishop Lindsay Urwins (engelska)

Brothers and sisters, what does the Lord ask of you, perhaps first and foremost?

He asks whether you believe and trust in him. It's the heartfelt question of our Saviour, and, because it is his question it continues to be asked by the apostles who become his messengers. And because it is their question it becomes the question the Church in every age; asked of anyone who wishes to be baptised.

It is asked with urgency, almost as if your life depended on it, but not so much with a finger warning sternness, but with a hopeful love. The Lord, all the angels and all his saints, Abraham who we heard of in the first reading, Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets, long for you to say like Martha : "Yes, I believe you are the resurrection and the life, I do believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God who is coming into the world."

You will perhaps have noticed that Jesus introduces his claim to be the Resurrection and the Life with the words 'I am'. He does this several times in John's Gospel. I am the bread of life. I am the true vine. I am the door. I am the Good Shepherd, I am the way the truth and the life. I am the light. This is of deep significance and crucial to our understanding of who it is who speaks to Martha.

When she, or anyone of the Jewish tradition heard Jesus say those words 'I AM' they would have thought of the day, recorded in the Book of Exodus, when God revealed his name to Moses. God says to Moses, 'I am who I am'. Go tell the Israelites that I AM has sent you. Now, you see the significance? How Jesus with both subtlety and clarity claims his divine identity. Elsewhere he will say, "Before Abraham was I AM". If you remember, when they came to arrest him and the soldiers ask if he is Jesus of Nazareth he answers I AM. And what happens? The soldiers fall to the ground, as if they are prostrate before God. And when Philip asks Jesus to show them the Father, Jesus answers, "To have seen me is to have seen the Father" and Thomas,

who needed to see and touch the wounds of the risen Lord before he would believe, becomes the first to declare to Jesus words of faith which have been echoed by millions through the ages:

“My Lord and My God!”

Brothers and sisters, it has never been easy to believe that the word became flesh and dwelt among us; that the one born of Mary existed from all eternity. That one who is God and lives forever could suffer and die, that he rose from the dead and that those who believe in him, though they die will rise with him and live eternally.

Our death seems so final. But here is a question. Is that longing for life after death which has stirred in mankind since pictures were painted on pyramid walls, since stories have been whispered into the ears of children, and which persists even among atheist hearts when someone they love dies; is it no more than a wish dream, just a failure to face reality? Or does Jesus, does his resurrection, reveal that the persistent inkling that we are made for more than this mortal life reveal the truth, that it is a hope implanted in our hearts by God? He has made us for himself and longs for us to abide in him forever! Is that the reality? The Lord invites us to live our life now as if that future hope is already true.

As I was preparing this sermon, I found myself wondering how it was that Martha was able to say yes to Jesus' question, able to believe in more than she could fully understand; believe when so many others could not or would not.

As I meditated on these things, I found a clue elsewhere, for what we heard just now is not the only time Martha, and her household appear in the gospels. We learn from Luke that they were folk who opened their home and their hearts to Jesus. Yes, on that occasion, but why? Because she was so busy trying to offer generous hospitality to Jesus. She wanted to do her best for him. Perhaps, she learned something from the Lord on that day when he gently and with loving humour chided her for the fuss, telling her that Mary, sitting at his feet listening to him, had chosen the better part. After all, there will come a time when there will be no meals to cook or pots to wash, no tasks to be done. Then we shall simply kneel and adore and worship him in eternity, and we won't even notice the time passing.

And because her brother Lazarus is described as a friend of Jesus, and we are told that Jesus loved Martha and Mary too, we can surely assume that he had become their familiar, even frequent guest. And maybe we can also imagine that her love for him meant she had long since given up worrying about her own reputation amongst the leaders of her faith who were increasingly hostile to him.

And so, little by little over time, Martha discovers that she had found in Jesus one who was yes, her friend, even another brother, but so much more than that, for he brought into her life and home and heart a presence like none other, the divine presence. And so, though she most surely did not fully comprehend what he was asking her to believe, she says Yes. In time she would discover that he will be another gift to her, the greatest gift he could be. He will be her Redeemer. That is why the Father sent him. And more, she will experience his continued presence in her life and in the Church through the Holy Spirit, which is both his Spirit, and the Spirit of the Father. In this recognition, Martha stands in the tradition in which any person of faith stands, of which Mary, the Lord's own mother is the first and foremost example. They and we live with mysteries, revealed mysteries which tower over us, for our eyes are surely too dim, our arms too short, our minds too small to comprehend what St Paul would call the height, length, width and depth of the divine love. Such love is not to be picked over and cannot be discovered under a microscope! Such love is to be pondered, mulled over, savoured and received.

Brothers and sisters, allow Jesus to abide in your home and in your heart. And just finally, in addition to this morning's question, Jesus asks two further questions recorded for us in the gospels. I must mention them, because they tell us what God wants us to know of him, and your answer to all three are necessary. In Matthew Chapter 9 we hear of two blind beggars who discover that Jesus is near. They cry out, "Lord have mercy", "Lord, have mercy?" Jesus turns and asks them... "Do you believe I can do this for you?" That is, do you believe in my mercy, my desire to have mercy and my authority to forgive? About this question, one of the great early preachers from the 4th century, John Chrysostom once said this: 'Let no one mourn that he has fallen into sin again and again; for forgiveness has risen from the grave.'

Trust in God's mercy for you, and be merciful to others as your heavenly Father is merciful. And when you find it difficult to be merciful, then pray, "stretch my heart, O God. Stretch my heart!"

The final question the Lord asks has a persistence like no other in the Gospels. It is on the beach after the resurrection. Jesus has cooked breakfast for some of the disciples and is now walking along the seashore with the one who has denied him three times, Jesus asks the same question three times, "Do you love me?" And all he wants from Peter is for him to say it. Yes, Yes, Yes. I love you! That will be enough for him to become the first leader of the Church.

There is a church I know well in London which has carved on the floor in a circle around the altar some words which come from one of my heroes, Augustine of Hippo. Very often I went there it make my confession. It reads 'We do not come to God by navigation, but by love.' Augustine was one of the greatest thinkers in the history of the Church, but he came to realise that because God is himself a communion of love, Father, Son, and Spirit, he can only truly be known by love. As you draw near to this altar later in this service, why not quietly say to the Lord. "I believe you are the Resurrection and the life. I trust in your mercy. I love you. I love you.

It will be enough to bring our Lord so much joy. More joy that you can know. And it will surely be enough to make the angels and saints, the patriarchs and the prophets sing!