

Dedication of the Lund Cross, 18 Jan 2018

Sermon by Rev Dr Kaisamari Hintikka, LWF Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Relations, Director for the Department for Theology and Public Witness

## **2 Cor. 5:14-20**

A bit less than two years ago, a meeting took place in this house. Similar meeting that we will have later today, the annual LWF-PCPCU joint staff meeting. Two years ago the agenda was mainly defined by the then the forthcoming ecumenical commemoration of the Reformation that took place in Lund in 2016. – There was already a decision that there will be a special cross, a Salvadoran cross, dedicated to that event. In relating to that, we needed to define what should be in that cross. And I must thank the artist, Christian Chavarria for his patience.

In the cross, we wanted to express what had already brought the Lutherans and Catholics to this advanced point of our common journey: our shared baptism, Holy Spirit, our unity in Christ, being branches the True Vine. But the main part of the discussion was focusing on: How do we see our future together? How can that be described in the cross? Our response to the call of Christ to be one, our wish and prayer to follow that call – to gather around the same Eucharistic table. And yet, acknowledging that we are not yet there. So much already, but not yet.

The text we have at hand, speaks about being in between the old and the new. When writing to the Christian community in Corinth, Apostle Paul is more open to the continuation between Jewish tradition and Christianity than in his more strict statements to the Galatians or the Romans for example.

Living in the continuum or, quite often, in the tension of old and new, past and future, is human. It is particularly familiar to us Christians, both individuals as well as communities. As churches, we build on our traditions, how they are rooted in the Bible, taught by the church fathers and mothers, expressed by our theologians, and lived out in our congregations.

Many of us see the Reformation as this kind of turning point, a watershed in the life of the church. When looking back at the Reformation anniversary, the year

2017, I can see another watershed. Already in preparation of the anniversary, we committed ourselves to ecumenical accountability and ownership in order to set a new tune compared to the earlier anniversaries. And indeed, the further we journeyed together towards and during the anniversary in prayer and in very concrete planning, the more we became aware of that “all this is from God”. This journey became a deeply spiritual one. And one of its culmination points was the ecumenical commemoration in Lund.

During the fifty years of dialogue, we, Lutherans and Catholics, have shared many gifts, and learned to see one another with new eyes. We have deepened our mutual commitment to continue together in prayer and joint witness. Today we can look at this journey with gratitude. The Holy Spirit has moved us closer to one-another, Christ continues to call us to move on, together.

I quote a Finnish theologian, Professor Heikki Kotila “Reconciliation means that we face our histories – individual or collective ones – our mistakes, wounds and faults. We face them, we see them, we do not deny them, but we do not become captured by them either.”

This is what the Apostle speaks about: God has given us the reconciliation in Christ, through his death and resurrection. And as the receivers of this gift, we are called to live out this reconciliation, to be the ambassadors, the representatives of Christ. In this call it is not just our words but also our deeds that count and speak: seeing the wounded world, hearing those who cry because of injustice, listening to the silent of the earth, - and to live out reconciliation also in our mutual relationship.

In few minutes, we are going to pray the Lord’s Prayer together. The prayer Jesus taught us reveals the dynamics of reconciliation: all have sinned before God, this we are called to confess on a daily basis – and because of the forgiveness we have received, we are called to forgive one another as well. The Lord’s Prayer is a prayer of reconciliation: the one who prays is not me, but us, all Christians together.

There is no reconciliation without renewal. In order to be reconciled, we need to change. Change our habits, convictions, attitudes, teachings – yes, even teachings – relationship to ourselves, to our neighbor, to God. But this is not all. Since we are reconciled, we are bound to change. So that, “if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”

