

Dear congregation, dear members of the Kaiserswerth Association Board,

In the excellent history book about the Diakoniewerk Gallneukirchen we find a picture of nine of the first deaconesses. They are looking proud and self-assured, even unflinching: very unusual for a woman at the end of the 19th century. Today's bible story includes all prejudices and tensions of a border area, where foreigners and locals meet, but we also encounter an equally brave woman, who deals with borders and competences in a way that Jesus is forced to learn something.

This woman is driven, torn by the misery of her child, by an almost unbearable strain. And this is why she is asking this question, completely out of order and without any hope to be fulfilled. Without end she is begging, pleading, screaming: Lord, help me! And when Jesus – as predicted – denies her plea, she starts an intelligent and adept discussion, which finally changes Jesus mind. Different to all other discussions, Jesus is not the one that speaks the last word. The argument of the woman wins over, the evil ban is destroyed, the immense trust of the woman leads to the healing of her daughter. Mercy wins over national, religious and theological borders.

Hearing this story I think of many people: first of all of the first sisterhood here in Gallneukirchen: humble the beginning, without clear structures, by two deaconesses trained in Stuttgart. But they longed to ease the suffering of others, both physical and mental suffering, connected and strengthened by their trust in Jesus, who told a woman: let it be to you as you desire.

Within the history of the Diakoniewerk Gallneukirchen we see those deaconesses acting surprisingly, self-assured and independent. They solved situations with difficult leadership, decided quickly and with a good view of the future. Did they have biblical women in mind, such as Hannah, Mirjam, Deborah, Maria or Martha? In any case, they did not shut their mouth down, like the woman from Canaan.

During these days I think about the many people wandering along and across the border, who experience many different treatments. But here we also find many people, who are so touched by the trouble and suffering of others, that they offer all kind of help – sometimes way over their own limits. I have the members of the Lutheran congregation in Budapest in mind who offer hot meals at the Keleti-station, the hundreds of volunteers at frontier town Nickelsdorf/Burgenland, the aides at Vienna Westbahnhof, at Linz and Salzburg. The refugees fled from enslaving and deathly powers and they celebrate as a wonder what is so common to us: to be fed satisfactory, to have a bed, a school for their children, no fear of governmental powers or terror, a quiet night.

We really need a person like the woman of Canaan to challenge our narrow thinking and value system with her intelligent questions! Who, walking along borders herself, does not give up, begging for help that really makes a change.

In front of this background I am asking myself: what did we give up, despite our many prayers and pleas – but is still waiting for our true faith, our constant hope?

Where do we leave our marks of strength, cleverness, steadiness like the woman of Canaan?

Are we able to skip our whole value and faith system in favor of a small help, an assistance needed and learn something new, like Jesus did? Can we be satisfied by the crumbs falling from the table that means rescuing all people? Or is it already hard enough to give away the "waste", crumbs from our family tables, so that many are fed and become happy? I realize that this story is framed by two others where bread is increased to last for thousands of people. It seems as if the private hope of this woman of Canaan to be healed by crumbs is widened up into the hope of many to rescue all people, all creation. To save a person saves the whole world. This wisdom you can find already in Talmud and it means heaven on earth for this person.

Let us continue to work small wonders every day in diakonia and in congregations together and let us trust in the words of Jesus, who was able to learn: Let it be to you as you desire! Amen.