

IN MEMORIAM – UUSIKAUPUNKI CHURCH 31.7.2020

Anssi Simojoki 7.9.1944 – 6.7.2020

We, as a family, have a great privilege, for we have been given a great spiritual inheritance as a legacy. Our father worked on many fronts in Finland and around the world, which brought many spiritual traditions to our home. This can be seen in today's choice of hymns. In this service we are singing from four different hymn books. The richness of my father's work has touched and supported us in the midst of our grief. We have received a huge amount of warm greetings from friends, colleagues and congregations in Finland, Europe, America, Africa, Asia and as far as Australia. What a testimony of father's life and work! On behalf of our mother and our entire family, we want to extend our gratitude to all of you who have remembered and supported us and who have prayed for us.

As a legacy we have also been left with material that my father himself produced: speeches, sermons, teachings, books, poems and hymns. Father leaves a lasting imprint to future generations. This imprint will guide and nourish long after father's death. But this rich, spiritual inheritance, has brought with it a positive challenge to the funeral arrangements. I can almost hear my father's sneer as I use in Finnish the loan word "positiivinen = positive" and instead of saying problem I use the word challenge. For my father, good, correct and precise language was very important. But this positive problem is this: how to filter the right texts, prayers and hymns to best commemorate him? On the evening of father's death, we gathered together for evening devotion with mother and Lassi at my parents' home, we contemplated what to sing. Should we choose a hymn that father loved dearly, or a hymn that he had himself translated or perhaps a hymn he had written himself? When my siblings and my mother were making the arrangements for today we faced the same issue. Which hymns to choose, which friends to ask to speak, how to bring forth the different aspects of father's long, rich and global life?

When I began to prepare this speech, I still had the same difficulty. What would be my focal point, when my mind was filled with dozens and hundreds of separate thoughts? However, slowly one passage of the Bible began to dominate. I could hear in my mind louder and more assertively these words of Paul to the Corinthians, which my father used in his sermons throughout his life: "*What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.*" 1. Cor. 2:9.

For my father his faith has turned into seeing. Words have changed into perfect hearing and waiting into fulfilment. God has prepared a well-deserved rest for his servant. I have said to many people that I do not regret anything my father left undone, not even the unfinished memoirs. Father is a

person from whom I would not dare ask for anything more nor wish that he would have accomplished more. Certainly he did enough for one lifetime. He was always prepared to work in the Lord's vineyard. It was very difficult for him to turn down requests to serve. In that work he became dirty, he fell, became tired, was frustrated, was disappointed and yet wanted to be faithful to his call as a Pastor, the call he had received – not from men, but from Christ. This call was a responsibility, but it also always supported and guided him. The work was never his own. It was always Christ's work. That is why his relationship with the Bible was so serious. How could he, a mere man, dare go against the Word, bypass it or set himself above it? The Word was the only strength that he had been equipped with. And as a Pastor, as a teacher, he had a responsibility towards it. To teach correctly, to guide people to Christ, to His Word and to the Gospel. To invite people in appropriate and inappropriate times to the fountain of salvation, to the forgiveness of sins and to life eternal. Not with his own strengths and abilities, although God had equipped father with those also, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the Word and Sacraments. This is why we so often heard him repeat the phrase, which he had learned in his childhood home: "As it is written, so it is true." And now, father is witnessing those amazing things that he so often preached about, but which even he could not perfectly see, hear or understand during his time on earth. The time for seeing, hearing and understanding came to him on July 6th 2020, in the garden of his beloved Koulukatu home.

As a pair to the passage from 1. Corinthians, father often quoted a verse from a hymn that used to be sung often in the South-West coast of Finland: *"If in the mystery of the cross, in this moment of grace, we could see those miracles, that we have not yet witnessed! Oh, teach us faith, to gain rest in you."* Zions Hymns 162:2. I personally think, that God in His mercy allowed my father to see many miracles already during his own lifetime. Many a begun work bore a plentiful harvest, and father lived to witness these. But these miracles and fruits are only shadows compared to that, which those who love Jesus get to witness as they move from this world to eternity. The real fruits and miracles are witnessed, not on earth, but only in eternity. The words at the end of the verse *"Oh, teach us faith, to gain rest in you"* were also an encouragement to father in his work. To him as a preacher, and as a Christian, the encouragement was that it was never about your work or achievements. Christians are not called to a rest of laziness, but a rest in faith. Father as a preacher and a Christian was not attending to his own business in his own strength. He, as we all are, was called to rest in faith in the complete work of Jesus on the cross, in a kingdom, which is not sustained by us but by Christ. The call is not taken by us, but given to us by Christ. The power is not our power, but it is the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible passage and hymn verse bring forth father's life philosophy. He always lived with his mind set on the future. Although father was very much a historian, he was never stuck in the past. Not

stuck in the past shamings, but neither stuck on past successes either. The central question was always what would follow next. He was given strong internal calls to serve. Often these calls were so strong he would not be left in peace by them. And in these instances, he would not give peace to others either. The Mission Diocese needed a hymnal and father put all his psychological weight towards seeing it happen. The leadership of the Mission Diocese at that time can certainly testify to this. But at the same time he personally began a substantial translation work of hymns. And when the book was finished, my father's translations ended in an instance. From that project he moved to build and serve the Amos Congregation in Laitila, which was his last place of service. So, always forward. It is amazing to think, that as he was preparing for the Sunday Service in Santtio Pyhäranta, which was a day before his death, my father had emphatically said to my mother, that after this Sunday Service it was time for him to finally retire. God prepared for father much better retirement days that father could ever expect or wish. Retirement days in the helm of Jesus, in the company of the angels and saints!

I am convinced that if father were speaking here today, he would also turn our minds to the future. So that each of us would have our own eternity clear in our minds. He had his time on earth, and now it is gone. God gave father an appropriate time of grace, which he, according to many testimonies, used wisely. Now it has turned into eternity. But we, we are still here. Our time of grace is here and now. All those beautiful promises of the Scriptures, that my father relied on, they are true to us too. Death is surely ahead of us all. It comes to us as a thief and a robber – usually without any warning. In front of this last call we are asked where lies our hope. Have we laid our hope on our own strength and wisdom, in our wealth, friends, relatives or work? These do not carry us in our death. No. Dear friends, relatives, you and me. The only thing that carries us over death is the complete work of salvation by Jesus on the cross. In that only do we have the forgiveness of sins and we have the promise of eternal joy and happiness in heaven. As Saint Peter preached: *"for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."* (Acts. 4:12). And that name is only Jesus.

In this one name, and only in this one name, we have been given everything. We can lay all our sins and trespasses on the cross and fully trust that Jesus has atoned them all for us. Joyfully we can rejoice in the amazing promise that has been given to those who trust in Him: *"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him."* Amen, come Lord Jesus.