

Landesbischof Dr. Christoph Meyns

**Sermon commemorating the destruction of Braunschweig in 1944
at Braunschweig cathedral on October 14th 2014**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today we commemorate the destruction of our town 70 years ago. We grieve for the people who died that night, were injured or lost their homes. We feel with those who were emotionally traumatized, often with lifelong consequences. We mourn the loss of much of our cultural heritage. With the lamentations of Jeremiah we call out: "How lonely sits the city that was full of people! Her gates have sunk into the ground; from on high he sent fire; into my bones he made it descend."

At the same time we acknowledge the truth about what caused it: the aggressive nationalism of the 19th century, the rise of anti-semitic ideologies after World War I, the political victory of the Nazi-Party in 1933, the establishment of a dictatorial regime under Adolf Hitler, the willingness of a majority of Germans to follow a path towards discrimination, war and destruction, driven by the promise of political greatness and bribed by social benefits, the start of a total war with the destruction of Warschau, Rotterdam, Bath, Coventry, Hull, Liverpool, London, Plymouth and countless other cities by strategic bombing, the foraging of European economies and unimaginable atrocities including the horror of concentration camps, massacres like the one in Oradour sur Glane, killing 27 million Russian soldiers and civilians and the genocide of six million Jews. Sadly, the Lutheran Church of Braunschweig was more part of the problem than part of the opposition against all this. In many cases ministers misused the gospel to sanctify ideas of national supremacy. Only a small minority realized that Nazi ideology was incompatible with the spirit of faith, hope and love and acted accordingly.

Looking back from the distance of 70 years, it is no less than a miracle, that the destruction of Germany in consequence of this barbarism did not mark the end of civilization in our country, but rather led to a renewal of society, a long and on going era of peace and prosperity, international cooperation, a bridging of gaps between cultures and, 25 years ago, the fall of the iron curtain and the reunification of Germany.

In 1944 most of us were either children or not even born. We are not to be personally blamed for what our forefathers did. But as Germans we are called to accept what happened as part of our national heritage. From that grows an obligation to contribute to peace and understanding where ever we can and to fight ideas and deeds that discriminate people, diminish there rights or destroy their lives. As it says in the gospel according to Matthew, chapter 5: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

Righteousness, mercy, purity of heart and peace are what we have found in Christ. Righteousness, mercy, purity of heart and peace are what we are called to live by:

- with regard to our families, neighbours and friends
- to our colleagues at work and our business partners
- with regard to our political friends as well as our adversaries
- and to our work as scientists
- with regard to the elderly, the sick and the handicapped
- those who adhere to another religion or no religion at all
- and with regard to migrants and refugees

Let this night be the constant reminder that hateful thoughts eventually lead to self-destruction, but thoughts of peace are what keeps us alive as it is written in the book of Jeremiah: "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." (Jer 29,11) Amen.