**Dear Congregation,**

**Then the kingdom of heaven shall be like ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were wise and five were foolish. 3 Those who were foolish took their lamps, but took no oil with them. 4 But the wise took jars of oil with their lamps. 5 While the bridegroom delayed, they all rested and slept.**

**6 “But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Look, the bridegroom is coming! Come out to meet him!’**

**7 “Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. 8 But the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps have gone out.’**

**9 “The wise answered, ‘No, lest there not be enough for us and you. Go rather to those who sell it, and buy some for yourselves.’**

**10 “But while they went to buy some, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.**

**11 “Afterward, the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open the door for us.’12 “But he answered, ‘Truly I say to you, I do not know you.’**

**13 “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.**

**Dear Congregation,**

**I want to start with the words of a young woman: “It was only a Friday evening at a rock concert. It was a great atmosphere, all were dancing and laughing. When the men came in through the main entrance and started shooting, we thought naively that this was part of the show. This was not an attack of terrorists, it was a massacre.” This is what a student from South Africa wrote. Two Fridays ago she watched the concert in the Bata clan Concert hall in Paris. She survived the attack, as she pretended for an hour to be dead laying on the floor.**

**One day later she wrote down what moved her heart. Her report is as follows: “When I was laying there in the blood of other people around me and waited for the bullet that would bring an end of my life of 22 years, I saw in front of me the eyes of each face that I have ever loved and who I whispered to: I love you. I thought about the high points of my life thus far. I wished that those whom I love would know that I do, wished that regardless what would happen to me, they would continue to believe in the good in humans. That they would not let these people win. In the last night the lives of many people have changed, and it will be up to us now to become better people. To live the life that these innocent victims of this tragedy have dreamed of, but sadly they will not be able to create. Rest in peace, angels! We will never forget you.**

**Dear congregation, more than one week after the attacks in Paris still the fear pushes in front of all the grief that many of us feel today. I am aware that in this woman’s words are no direct link to the story we heard about the 10 young women. However, that is not important right now. Yet the grief over 129 victims of the attacks needs to be heard and shared on this Sunday called “Ewigkeitssonntag” (Sunday remembering Eternity)**

**Some of us are sitting in this worship service with their own sad memories. Memories of beloved persons who you had to burry this past year or years. The death of a beloved person can bring so much: bitter pain about a heavy loss, returning beautiful memories of closeness, tenderness and shared life and beautiful days. And then again these heavy memories of ongoing conflict with screaming and shattering china, thoughts of many things that have not been resolved and could not be worked through before death. Thoughts of being stressed by life and also those things that have been accomplished, pride in those milestones that had been reached.**

**Our dead have been buried for a few days or months now. They live on in our memories. Every person who grieves knows: “I can still do something for them. I go to the cemetery and pray close to the graveside. I am connecting words of hope with memories. At home I look at photo albums or at letters. I sort through clothes, belongings and memorabilia.” Some persons who are grieving buy a candle and light it. Later they take this candle to the cemetery and light it again. This candle reminds them of the beloved person. It brings a little light into the darkness, to the cemetery weariness and the grief shadows of one’s own soul. Candles remind of the oil lamps of the smart and foolish young women. Maybe the oil lamps were torches, but that does not matter really for our story.**

**Candles, oil lamps and torches offer light. All three have limited strength to shine. The set a tiny space of life against the overwhelming dark, not more. They don’t eliminate the darkness. The flame of a candle is taking a stand against the darkness, and it burns facing several darknesses: the darkness of grief, the darkness of death itself and also facing the darkness of terror and violence.**

**Sometimes even those are grieving deeply who knew the deceased only from afar. Attention and awareness are suddenly given to those who died publicly: School shooting victims, the writers and caricaturists of Charlie Hebdo, the victims of the attacks in Beirut and Paris. I am convinced that public grief is just as necessary as private grief, also when it comes to individuals who Germany lost this past year: Richard von Weizsaecker, Helmuth Schmidt, Pierre Brice, Harry Rowohlt and Anita Ekberg.**

**Therefore watch, says Jesus at the end of the story of the young women. Watch and pay attention! Stay alert and don’t allow to become tired! Jesus is talking here about an awake attention facing eternity. And this attention Jesus is talking about has to do also with waiting. We are entering the advent time. “Advent” means waiting for Jesus to arrive. The Christian “waiting” always orients itself towards eternity. The Psalmist of Psalm 90:12 writes: “Lord, teach us that we have to die, so that we become wise.” In that wisdom of faith we wait for the coming of God’s Kingdom. That is the image of the wedding with the groom that Jesus talks about in this parable with the young women. The Kingdom of God – that is the wedding meeting the groom that Jesus tells about in his parable. The Kingdom of God is a feast, a “wedding” between the Heaven of God and us humans on the earth.**

**Forget about the morale of the story. It does not have a morale, at least not how fairy tales have a morale. The ten young women are not Gold Mary and “Pech” Mary who are being judged because of their business or their laziness**

**The ten young women do not differ from each other that much. All are being described the same way. All wait with their lamps in the house of the bride, all want to help that the wedding celebration will be beautiful and festive. All are then falling asleep, and all are suddenly being surprised by the arrival of the groom. None of the young women is therefore better than another, no word for example that the five wise women for example did not fall asleep.**

**There is only one single difference: Five of the women being startled when waking up do have oil with them and therefore can light their lamps right away and join the wedding procession. The other five who are later being called “foolish” only notice at that very moment what they had forgotten. They are therefore not worse or lazier than the wise women. The effort to take oil with them the other five would not have resisted. To have oil available is not such a great accomplishment.**

**No, they are not bad or lazy, but they miss something fundamental: The far reaching perspective. They are missing the strength to think beyond the current moment. Right now they are dressed up festive and they have their lamp with them, but when the groom arrives, they will need something else. They did not think that they needed oil as the essential part of their lamp.**

**Our story is being misunderstood if one tries to apply categories of “busy and lazy” or “good and bad”. Jesus does not call this story “Of the virtuous and lazy” or “of the good and bad” young women. No, this is about wisdom and foolishness, about long term view and short term view.**

**Wisdom as our story understands it is the long term view of the heart, we one could call “longing”. This longing as wisdom expects that there is something beyond the present circumstances that we know. It encourages to think beyond the present moment. It is expectancy of the unexpected and the oil as the longing that we use to pour into our daily life with it and being able to kindle it and make it shine. This long term perspective of the heart that distinguishes the wise women from the foolish, you can’t get from somebody else. That helps explain the part that before I thought of as particularly mean and lacking solidarity. The wise women are not able to share with the foolish ones, even if they wanted to. This oil, this longing of the heart each has to have and find on their own.**

**Yet, where do we get this longing? You can’t buy it as the foolish women try to do last minute.**

**However, longing does become alive when we allow our daily life to be interrupted, when we allow to be woken up as these women and when we notice what we are missing and longing for.**

**In our routines of our days, weeks and years, as our life goes on, we need those essential interruptions. In those moment where are daily routine gets interrupted, the longing can come alive, the longing of what will behind that door, the long term perspective that somebody will be coming to meet us.**

**Today, on the Sunday when we remember eternity, some of us don’t feel at all like having a feast or like being joyful. It is good to know that even in the limitations of our view into the future, in the wounds of having to say good bye and in the pain of grief the longing can become alive, maybe even much stronger than in times of joy.**

**The longing that things won’t remain as they are. In those places where we experience the edge of life, we start looking with burning eyes for the land in which all tears will be wiped and our mouth will be filled with laughter.**

**The story of Jesus about the wise and the foolish women wants to make us wise, so that we don’t regard our longing as being insignificant and therefore keep it small. Longing is nothing less than God’s trace in our life. Our longing is the oil that helps us light the bigger flame of hope.**

**The Danish author Tania Blixen writes about this kind of longing:**

**„Up to this day, nobody has seen that those migrating birds take their long flights towards warmer countries that don’t really exist, or that the rivers find their ways through rocks and valleys flowing towards the oceans that do not really gather them. God surely has not created such longing, without having the reality in God’s hands that belong to its fulfillment. Our longing is our path.”**

**The trail that our longing creates and that lights the torch, lamp or candle of our hope, leads us straight to God’s feast. And thus, our sadness and grief about our beloved, known and unknown to us, peacefully dying or murdered in the most horrific way, is embedded in the hope of God’s coming Kingdom. God’s Kingdom stands for the hope beyond death. And this hope we entrust ourselves.**

**This hope is fragile, vulnerable, sometimes very small, sometimes hidden and still yet, it is the only light that we as people following Christ can uphold faced with the sometimes merciless power of death. And this hope grows out of our faith in Jesus who went through death and has been raised to life in God.**

**The theologian Juergen Moltmann describes our longing that leads to hope as follows: “But the ultimate reason for our hope is not to be found at all in what we want, wish for and wait for; the ultimate reason is that we are wanted and wished for and waited for. What is it that awaits us? Does anything await us at all, or are we alone? Whenever we base our hope on trust in the divine mystery, we feel deep down in our hearts: there is someone who is waiting for you, who is hoping for you, who believes in you. We are waited for as the prodigal son in the parable is waited for by his father. We are accepted and received, as a mother takes her children into her arms and comforts them. God is our last hope because we are God's first love.”**

**― Jürgen Moltmann, The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life**

**Therefore the hope filled words of the young South African student speak to those who have died: “Rest in peace, angels”.**

**Amen**