

Hanna Reichel's Sermon at the Kirchentag Closing Service, 4 May 2025

(1a)

"Nothing separate us," – wow, I can really see that! You're standing shoulder to shoulder, here at Human Rights Square. And for four days we have *experienced* that: reflected, laughed, prayed together. "Nothing can separate us!" After four days of Kirchentag I believe that is true.

But may I tell you something? I will be happy, all the same, when I sleep in my own bed again this evening, and when I can also close a door behind me. Much as I love you, other people are *also* quite tiring.

And the closer we get to one another, the easier we get on each other's nerves. You always leave the toilet lid up. You laugh about things I don't find funny at all. I have to give you a talking-to yet again.

A bit of distance is healthy. You let me be the way I am. I let you be the way you are.

"Nothing can separate us?" With some people that would be a real challenge. "Nothing can separate us!" That can be totally abusive! Along the lines: "Love must bear with that..." All too often Christians and the churches have also said. If you point to a problem the buck is even passed to you. "Nothing can separate us" is then emotional blackmail.

That has nothing to do with love.

"Nothing can separate us?!" We are miles apart!—in society too. We can't just paper over the divide with love. Along the lines: "You have to bear with it that I am a selfish pain in the neck..." Putting a good face on it is not peace. There is no reconciliation if there is compromising and ducking the issue.

(1b)

"Nothing can separate us? – *from the love of God!*" That is the love that binds. *God's* love bears us. As surely as the ground on which we are standing here together. As surely as the ground on which you have slept with your camping mattress in the last few days. As surely as the ground at the different places for which we are going to set off again today.

And God's love shows us what love *is*. If our face turns hard as stone, God's love blows at us until we blink. God's love looks right into the last corner for what we would rather forget. And where we wall ourselves in, God's love peeps over and says: I won't leave you on your own.

(2a)

God's love *connects* us – and that also means God stands *in between*.

Without God I am abandoned without protection.

God's love is the buffer between you and me: so that I can breathe. God's love is the protective space between me and you: so that I don't crush you.

God's love intervenes and says: Stop. Go no further. That is my beloved child.

And so God's love makes *me* courageous. Courageous to draw lines against the abuse of false declarations of love. Courageous to say "no", to say:

That is not love, that is blackmail.

That is not love. That is exploitation.

That is not love. *That* is violence.

Do not touch me.

(2b)

US Vice-President JD Vance recently talked about the "order of love": that we "naturally" love our family first, then our nation and then—*perhaps* if there is any love over!—other people.

Pope Francis—God bless his soul—just out of hospital, laughed and said, *my dear JD*, that has *nothing* to do with Christian love.

God's love doesn't stop at your garden fence. God's is wider than your social network and your tea party, and is definitely greater than your pathetic little racism.

Fear makes love so small and narrow until it is no longer distinguishable from exclusion and enmity. But God's love makes us *strong* against fear. God's love says, "Don't be afraid!"—Und broadens the horizon *so* widely.

God's love is not a club and not a "place in the sun." "Nothing can separate us from the love of God." That doesn't mean: God belongs to *us* (all alone!)—That means: *We belong to God.*

The whole world belongs to God. And God's love belongs to the "others", and even if they are annoying.

What we *should* be afraid of engaging in politics with our small-minded love. Our small-minded love builds walls, creates barriers, and divides the world into friend and foe.

But nothing of what we find so divisive and threatening can separate us from the love of God, Paul said. *Nothing*. Neither height nor depth, nor angels, nor rulers. *Nothing!* In heaven or on earth, nor anything else in creation—*all that*, Paul says, *was made by God.*

That is God's world.

If you realise that, what do you need to fear?

(2c)

God's love makes us courageous and it makes us strong and it makes us *resolute* to bear with the challenge of the others.

Because it *is* a challenge. I have to put up with you even if I find you totally narrow-minded. And you have to put up with me, even if you don't know what to make of me. *But how are you supposed to know who I am? And how am I to know whether you think I am a freak? And how does that fit with "love"?*

It is a real challenge: we have to work together because our planet has reached a tipping-point. *Why should you reduce your speed limit if billionaires fly to Mars? Why should I eat less meat when the rain forest is on fire there? I would like to be spared your moralising.* How can we manage to get “reconciliation”?

It’s a real challenge. There are people who have escaped violence and persecution. *I’d prefer to live in a world in which I don’t have to be scared of my neighbour. Of these neighbours too. That’s why they’ve come to live here.* Who has a right to an intact world? How do you make “peace”?

I need you so that we can live. That is the challenge. The challenge, which we can least forgive others, is that they are *really* dependent of *us* for life or death. How annoying: I should change my life.

God made that, for us.

We see that in Jesus.

We see that everywhere the spirit blows.

And God says: you can do that too. Summon up your courage.

Be as resolute as Yitzhak Frankenthal from the Parents’ Circle. That is an organisation of parents who have lost their children to the violence between Israelis and Palestinians. Yitzhak Frankenthal says: “We *must* live together and we must *decide*: either we share our country or we share the cemetery under it.”

What a heart! Divine: the father who lost a child himself holds to the idea of not giving death *any* more power. Not in his life and not in the life of others.

Where our heart is narrow, God opens God’s heart *so* widely that there is no longer any room for separation and enmity and death.

We just have to live with that.

(3)

God’s love is not for weak nerves. But God’s love makes us light.

“Nothing can separate you from the love of God.” That is why you are *strong* enough to put up with me and I’m strong enough to bear with you.

“Nothing can separate us from the love of God.” That is why we are quite *resolute*: A crowd of small-minded pains in the neck are becoming the community of saints.

“Nothing can separate us from the love of God” – we’ll carry this courage from Human Rights Square into God’s whole, wide world.

Amen! That is: may it come to pass.