

## Everything you do ... – On the 2024 annual motto

Sermon from 14.01.2024 in Dättlikon ZH, Reverend Dr. Jakob Vetsch

Today your preacher is urged to make a small contribution to internalizing the motto for 2024, which is taken from the apostle Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth (chapter 16, verse 14) and reads briefly:

"Everything you do,  
be done in love."

However, I am reluctant to come up with this simple guide to everyday life, with which the apostle wanted to encourage the listening church in Corinth towards the end of his letter; indeed, I am now reluctant to come up with lofty theological interpretations and to talk about things that we either already know or that are of no interest to us at all. Just two things first:

God's love for us humans runs through the Old and New Testaments of the Bible like a common thread. The Lord God created us in His image and took on human form in Jesus Christ - an incredible solidarity! Everything becomes so concrete, and it comes so close.

And the second thing first: in the German language, we only know the rather rudimentary word for so many shades: *love*. In the English Bible (KJV) it is more differentiated:

"Let all your things  
be done with *charity*."

The original Greek text knows the word "agape" [πάντα ὑμῶν ἐν ἀγάπῃ γινέσθω.] The aim is therefore to *love one's neighbor*. The English language speaks so movingly of "brotherly love", and there is a reference to Christianity in the explanation of the term.

So these two things first. But instead of going into theory, I spontaneously thought of the man who, as a result of his care

for a kitten, had earned himself nothing less than an invitation to heaven! This story suddenly shone impressively on me from the treasury of Sufism, the mysticism of Islam. It goes something like this:

Once upon a time there was a man called Ali. He lived in a small village. Ali was known for his kindness and compassion towards all living beings, whether human or animal.

One day, he came across a hungry cat on the street. As many would have done, he was unable to ignore it and walk past it, but stopped, bent down and took care of it. He quickly shared his food with the animal and stroked it gently.

The kitten was touched by Ali's love and showed him his gratitude. From then on, it accompanied him wherever he went.

One night, while Ali was sleeping outside, he had an extraordinary dream: he saw himself surrounded by angels. His heart was as light as a feather.<sup>1</sup> The angels brought him an invitation to heaven, and they also explained to him the reason for it, which was his compassion for the needy cat!

Ali woke up amazed and grateful at the same time. All at once, he realized the deep meaning of his actions. He had not only helped a hungry creature, but had also experienced divine mercy through his love for an inconspicuous creature.

So much for the story of Ali and the cat, the dream and the angels, and the invitation to heaven. The unnoticed, the small, becomes great through attention and relationship. Even the smallest act of compassion and love towards other living beings can have spiritual rewards. Compassion and love are universal values that can guide us humans to a higher spiritual consciousness.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Egyptian mythology, the heart that is weighed in the judgment of the dead should be as light as a feather, i.e. free from sin and guilt ([Aegypten-geschichte-kultur.de/das-totengericht](http://Aegypten-geschichte-kultur.de/das-totengericht)).

Yes, love has many facets. The key to it is compassion, the mercy that repeatedly drove Jesus to perform acts of kindness and miracles for those entrusted to Him. He also recommends it to *us* when He proclaims it (Matthew 25:40):

"What you have done for one of the least of these, you have done this to *me*."

This is not just a matter of ethics and morals, but also of knowledge, wisdom and truth. We don't have to feel constantly overwhelmed. We simply call upon our insight that no human being is perfect and that we can always draw from the infinite pool of God's love.

It is important to remember that the love meant here in Jesus Christ includes *forgiveness* and *reconciliation*. Unfortunately, however, these are not "subito values". It is often a long road - for ourselves; and we also have to admit this to others. Patience, courage and humility are required. We are challenged, challenged.

But we are never alone. God's all-encompassing love is for our neighbor just as much as it is for us. If we do not make progress in our good endeavors, we should not fret, but count on the mercy of the Father in heaven. We now know that the great invitation to heaven will not come as a result of successful litters, but perhaps because of a kitten that we have mercy on.