

Ecumenical Service for the 76th Anniversary of Miriam Rosenthal's Liberation

Protestant Church of Reconciliation,
built on the actual location of the former prisoner camp site,
a short distance from the crematorium.

Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site

April 2021

Jesus Christ says:

For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.

There are two of us here today in the Protestant Church of Reconciliation,
on the site of the former Dachau Concentration Camp.

Today, just under a week before the 76th anniversary of the camp's liberation,
we would like to remember the victims of this place of terror.

My name is Björn Mensing, and I am the pastor of this church. With me behind the camera is Deacon Frank Schleicher. He is filming our prayer, so that those who wish to can watch this recording at home. The church is currently closed due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

We would like to send particularly warm wishes to the survivors of the concentration camps, as well as the allied liberators and their families. We know that some of them will be watching this at home. This is a great joy and honour, and we do not take this for granted – especially given the involvement of the German churches in National Socialism. Bearing in mind my own family's past, I face you with the words of the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt from the Fall of 1945:

“It is with great pain that we say:
through us, boundless suffering has been brought to many peoples and places”.

At the core of our short ecumenical service today shall be the memory of a prisoner of the Dachau concentration camp:

Miriam Rosenthal was born in the town of Komárno in Slovakia in 1922. She had thirteen older brothers and sisters. When the southern part of Slovakia was annexed by Hungary – at that time allied with Nazi Germany – things got much worse for her Jewish family.

Miriam married her fiancée Béla in 1944. This was the time in which the German Wehrmacht was marching into Hungary, and the deportation of Hungarian Jewry followed soon after. Just two months after their marriage, the young couple were separated and Miriam was transported to Auschwitz. After some months in Auschwitz and the Plaszow concentration camp, she arrived at the Augsburg outer camp in Bavaria. She arrived in the Kaufering I outer camp by the time she could no longer conceal her pregnancy from the camp guards – effectively a death sentence for a Jewish woman in a concentration camp.

On the 28th February 1945, under squalid and unhygienic conditions, she gave birth to her son Leslie in one of the camp barracks. In the preceding weeks six other Jewish women from Hungary were able to give birth to their children. With the support of other prisoners, the seven mothers and their babies miraculously survived.

On the 26th April they were transported to the Dachau concentration camp, where they were liberated by U.S. Army soldiers three days later. When Miriam returned to her homeland

she learned that almost her entire family had been murdered.
Her husband, Béla, had survived.

The young family emigrated to Canada. They settled in Toronto, where Miriam would later manage a Jewish book shop. She was involved with the local Jewish community for many years, including as a survivor sharing her testimony. She once said that she always prayed the younger generation would change the world. Faith, hope, and love – Miriam never lost these, even in times of great need such as in Auschwitz and Dachau.

Miriam Rosenthal died on the 10th February 2018 at the age of 95. She is survived by three children, seven grandchildren, and seventeen great-grandchildren.

Leslie Rosenthal celebrated his seventy sixth birthday in Toronto just a few weeks ago.

This candle burns for Miriam Rosenthal and her family.

Hinne mah tov uma naim (Psalm 133:1)

We now light a candle for all those who were murdered, here in Dachau
and in the millions of other places under the violence of national socialist tyranny:

Jewish men, women and children, Sinti and Roma peoples, Communists,
Social Democrat politicians, and other women and men active in resistance,
Jehovahs Witnesses, homosexuals, the socially excluded who were labled as ‘asocial’ and
‘career criminals’, forced labourers, Polish priests and pastors, and Soviet prisoners of war.

We remember those who have been victims of anti-Semitism, racism,
political persecution and violence since 1945.

We remember those allied soldiers who fell in the struggle against Hitler’s Germany.

May they all rest in peace for ever more.

Kyrie Eleison

Even in the most sorrowful times of our lives, God will not abandon us.
God wants to comfort and support us. Christians in the city of Coventry, England,
experienced this after the deadly German air raid on their city in November 1940.

After the destruction of the cathedral, its Provost chose to have the words “Father forgive”
carved into a wall of the ruins. These words define the Coventry Litany of Reconciliation.

The prayer is said every Friday at noon in the ruins of the cathedral and in more than
200 Cross of Nails Partners around the world. The original cross was assembled from nails
that had held together the planks of the cathedral’s arched roof. Replicas of the Coventry
Cross of Nails are a sign of reconciliation and can be found here in Dachau
and in many other places around the world, where people take up the task to heal
the wounds of history and to work together in finding new paths for a peaceful future.

We will pray the Coventry Litany of Reconciliation:

The hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class, Father, forgive.

The covetous desires of people and nations to possess what is not their own, Father, forgive.

The greed which exploits the work of human hands and lays waste the earth, Father, forgive.

Our envy of the welfare and happiness of others, Father, forgive.

Our indifference to the plight of the imprisoned, the homeless, the refugee, Father, forgive.

The lust which dishonours the bodies of men, women and children, Father, forgive.

The pride which leads us to trust in ourselves and not in God, Father, forgive.

Eternal God,

you have come among us in Christ to reconcile the world to yourself,
and have entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation.

Strengthen all who work for the healing of conflict and pain amongst your human family.

Bless all those in the worldwide Community who bear witness to the grace and truth
of your crucified and risen Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Go out into the world, in the evening and in the morning.

God, creator of light, bless you and all peoples and everything
that carries the breath of life within it.

God bless you as the sun rises around the earth;

whether you are the morning star that watches over Australia;

the morning sun that rises over Asia;

the sun of justice that brings Africa a new blessing;

the dawn that shines across Europe;

the sunlight that gives itself to the vast South and North Americas.

God bless you and keep you.

God care for you.

God protect you and fill your life with love.

Amen.

Conception and text: The Rev. Dr. Björn Mensing, Pastor and Historian, Protestant Church
of Reconciliation, on the site of the former Dachau Concentration Camp.