

## Award of the Menno Simons Sermon Award 2023

### To Pastor Joachim Leberecht, Herzogenrath/Germany

On Sunday, **September 3, 2023**, the *Center for Peace Church Theology* (University of Hamburg) together with the Mennonite congregation Hamburg-Altona will award the international Menno Simons Sermon Award to Joachim Leberecht, pastor of the protestant Lydia-Congregation Herzogenrath. The public award ceremony will take place after the service in the Mennonite Church Hamburg Altona (10:00 am), where the award-winning sermon will be heard. All interested are warmly invited.

Also via live broadcast:

<https://www.youtube.com/c/MennonitengemeindeZuHamburgUndAltona>

**The award-winning sermon** was preached on Good Friday 2022 in the protestant Markuskirche (Herzogenrath) as part of a Passion Sermon Series on *7 dreams from the Book of Books*. Surprisingly, it starts from a nightmare of Claudia Procula (wife of Pontius Pilate), which Selma Lagerlöf created in her “Christ Legends”. In this dream, war victims of all times show up to reach out to “the great prophet of Nazareth” who “will abolish war and enmity and bring peace on earth”. They are disappointed, for “Pilate killed him”. – The sermon directly connects the nightmare with the present experience of the war in Ukraine: “The bet is not on peace, it is on war. The dream of peace has been shattered,” the sermon states in clear, concise language. According to the legend, Claudia Procula later became a Christian herself, “let herself be caught up in the goodness, love and non-violence of her Lord” and died a martyr. – On Good Friday, the sermon recalls Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and concludes: “We should sacrifice no more people. It is enough once and for all.” The preacher expresses shame for the attitude of church leaders in this war and recalls the witness of conscientious objectors. “Through Jesus’ death we are liberated and called to nonviolent resistance”, the sermon concludes.



Photo: Juliane Siekmann

**Pastor Joachim Leberecht** has been a pastor in the Protestant Church in the Rhineland (EKiR) for 30 years, first in Braunfels in Jesse, and for the past 10 years in the border triangle in Herzogenrath, near Aachen. With the aim of strengthening the culture of preaching, he initiated the Herzogenrath Passion Sermons in the Markuskirche.

Leberecht studied Protestant theology at the Kirchliche Hochschule Berlin and in Tübingen. The pastor, who is passionate about art and literature, promotes narratives and spiritual impulses as an editor, and organizes readings and literary discussions. He is part of the Aachener pastoral care network *Seelsorge buchen*, and is also active as a speaker in the training of emergency pastoral care.

To counter the feeling of powerlessness in the face of the war in Ukraine, Joachim Leberecht calls on Russia and Ukraine every Thursday during a public vigil at the weekly market in Herzogenrath-Mitte with a poster: *Put down the weapons!*

The international **Menno Simons Sermon Award** is intended to encourage and honor sermons that bring the biblical witness into the light of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. In the horizon of lived ecumenism, they should promote peace church orientation and convince through credibility and offer spiritual strengthening. Furthermore, the sermons are intended to stimulate substantive discussion of current issues in public life – beyond one's own denominational boundaries.

The award was donated by Dr. h.c. Annelie Kümpers-Greve (1946-2017), member of the Mennonite congregation Hamburg-Altona. It is endowed with 2,000 euros, half of which goes to the award winner and half to their congregation.

The **jury** is composed of Mennonite theologians from various countries, chaired by Prof. Dr. Fernando Enns (Endowed Chair 'Theology of Peace Churches'), with Prof. em. Dr. Hans Martin Gutmann (Practical Theology, University of Hamburg) serving as external reviewer. Other members of the jury are: Lukas Amstutz (Switzerland), Pastor Birgit Foth (Ludwigshafen), Pastor Dr. Christiane Karrer (Netherlands), Dr. Andrés Pacheco Lozano (Colombia/Netherlands) and Heinrich Wiens (Detmold).

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<https://www.theologie.uni-hamburg.de/einrichtungen/arbeitsstelle/friedenskirche.html>