

With balance and depth - Spiritual impulse by Esther Göbel

The spoken word counts! I will give the lecture largely freely.

Music (Luis Weiß) and Psalm:

I should throw my heart into the surf, but I
beg for security.*

*I lie on the sofa**

and talk about the swell of the times.

I hold my toe in the water and tell stories of storms, my adventure stories
are written in the bathtub.*

My Jesus wanders across the Sea of Galilee in a life jacket, my Holy Spirit
comes along in the torrent.*

*My God the Father decides the abatement of the hurricanes,**

I only know the water from the water pipe and do not rely on the waters of creation.

I should throw my heart into the surf, but I
beg for security.*

(From the Water Psalms by Gottfried Bachl)

Introduction

I am a soul surfer. That's how people describe themselves for whom surfing is more than just a sport. For them, surfing is also an inner attitude and has significance for shaping their own lives.

I am a theologian and windsurfing instructor and over time I have developed a surf spirituality all my own. For the last 5 years I have been offering the "Surf Course with Depth" as a retreat format for adults.

Surf&Soul is my vocation. For me, this is where personal passion, professional occupation and the mission of the church come together.

With Surf&Soul I try to link faith and life in a way that is especially about experiencing that body, soul and spirit are connected. It is about finding out what serves people, makes them grow inside and brings them into balance. Heading for goals, experiencing frustration and joy, seeking orientation or keeping one's composure are on the one hand experienced concretely on the water and on the other hand reflected upon as metaphors for their relevance to one's own life.

This morning, I would like to try to answer three pressing current issues - which have certainly also been the subject of discussion here these days - from my wealth of experience:

1) Spirituality yes - Church no

Many people turn away from the institution of the church, but have a lasting interest in spirituality, faith and relationship with God. And experience shows that we also find this interest among non-denominational people outside our established church.

So how do we get a match between this existing interest and our biblical message of a loving and merciful God?

2) Pastoral care yes please - but how?

We find ourselves in a confusing situation of change, both in the church and in society. Previous concepts no longer work. But no one knows exactly how pastoral work can succeed today. And it is becoming increasingly apparent that there are no patent recipes. So how can we act in a goal-oriented, responsible and professional manner in uncertain situations?

3) Institutionally, there are lulls, storms and headwinds - how can I STAY on course?

Many pastoral workers are frustrated, exhausted or even resigned by a lack of courage and ideas as well as an unwillingness to reform and the inertia of institutional structures. How do YOU manage to keep your heart on fire, act with balance and depth, and reach your goal even in the face of headwinds?

1. ALOHA-SPIRIT(UALITY)

Surfing is one of the **oldest sports in the world**, probably over 1000 years old. And surfing is the only sport - that I know of - with actual religious origins: it was the sport of the kings of Polynesia. The Hawaiians manoeuvred their very flat canoes through the surf after fishing, using the power of the wave. The word nalu literally means to *glide to shore with a wave*, thus *surfing in* Hawaiian. But this pragmatic beginning of surfing did not only have the sporty-skilled aspect, but was rather an important component of their nature religion, which revered the sea as a deity, because Nalu also means *the way to oneself*. The way to feel at one with the gods.

Religion expresses itself through doctrines and beliefs fixed to a creed, as well as certain forms of worship. In this sense, the **Aloha Spirit**, closely associated with centuries of Polynesian culture, is more of a

Philosophy of life that is all about the magic of living in harmony with nature and oneself. This certainly includes the belief, based on the principles of love and forgiveness, that everything and everyone is interconnected. Core values include helpfulness, sharing, not hurting others and gratitude for the gifts of heaven and earth.

It is sometimes assumed that people without religious conviction and commitment also have no spirituality. I can definitely deny that, both with regard to surfers and as a theologian in the diaspora of eastern Germany.

I understand spirituality in general as a search for (life) meaning. Every human being has a need for meaning and the ability to give things a meaning. In this respect, every human being also has a spirituality, because it is part of human existence.

And it has been my experience that many surfers are highly spiritual, regardless of whether they otherwise consider themselves devout or religious.

Their spiritual experiences are similar to those of Christians, but they use different terms such as "flow", "oneness", "stoked" or "aloha".

I can tell a lot about God as a theologian and pastoral counsellor, but in the context of water sports certainly not with the Christian traditional / church vocabulary. I need to start from the experiential world of surfers, share their spiritual experiences and use their words to reflect on those experiences. What does it mean to be exposed to the winds of life, to have to deal with headwinds, to feel pressure in the sail or fear of sinking? And how can the redemptive and liberating message of the Gospel be reformulated in this context?

I would like to use the term "aloha" as an example to illustrate this:

1) The literal meaning of aloha is the *presence of breath*.

It is about the very fundamental principle of life that also underlies the Christian creation myth: man is given breath by God and thus becomes an animate living being. The Hebrew word "*ruach*" literally means "breathing creature". Many exercises in contemplative prayer and meditation are about the conscious perception of the breath with the aim of dwelling "in the presence of the breath of God". In both, therefore, we encounter God as the life-giving principle par excellence.

2) Philosophically, aloha means "*to hear what has not been said, to see what is not visible and to sense what cannot be known*". In Christian terms, however, faith is "*standing firm in what one hears, being convinced of things not seen*" (Heb 11:1).

Both are about reading between the lines of life and the primordial human longing for a greater principle, for an answer to the question of the meaning of life. Why is not nothing, but rather something?

3) Those who say aloha express an inner connection to their fellow human beings. It is commonly used as a greeting ("*hello / goodbye*"), but also as an expression of affection (e.g. as "*good health*", "*happy birthday*", "*all the best for your journey*" or "*best wishes to XY*"). At the same time, it resonates (as with "*Shalom*" or "*Salem aleikum*") far more than we can say with a German word like "*Liebe*".

When *showing aloha* expresses itself in *doing or saying kind things*, then it means nothing else to me than the Latin word for blessing: *benedicere = to say good things*. In this sense, I also understand the word "*aloha*" as a form of blessing. I often say this blessing aloha in everyday life - and most people understand this even without knowing what I have just said.

2. BALANCE

What fascinates me about surfing is that no two spots are the same, no two sessions are the same. It never gets boring, no day is like the other. Wind, water and waves write new stories every day and change the uniqueness of each surf spot with the elements of nature. This uncontrollability and transience is precisely what makes it so appealing. The many variables of location, weather, physical conditions and inner mood must be taken into account in the rare moments of happiness, when everything is in flow, time stands still and perfect conditions prevail. I call the combination of maximum concentration, maximum effort and trusting devotion "**contempl-action**". Many people describe surfing - whether it's surfing, windsurfing or kitesurfing - as a form of meditation, in which the energy of the water, which has accumulated over miles of ocean in a wave, is transferred to you. And despite total exhaustion, the whole body is flooded with a positive force afterwards.

Finding a firm footing on a wobbly board is the first task my surf students face. On the one hand, loose in the joints, on the other hand, with body tension so as not to be thrown off again by every water movement. It takes patience to develop a body feeling in the combination of tension and flexibility. And it takes courage to venture onto unfamiliar shaky ground.

The combination of tension and mobility is the physical dimension of contemplation. For the spiritual dimension, too, I need tension on the one hand, a being attentively focused, and on the other hand mobility in the form of openness and curiosity about what comes to me in prayer.

Contemplation means to *look at, to observe close up or to direct one's attention to something*. This involves more than seeing with the eyes and the pure stimulus to the optic nerve. I have to want to recognise the dimension behind it and orient myself towards discovering it - even if it is not infrequently denied to me.

I cannot create contemplative moments myself. I can look at things with openness and curiosity, but whether I recognise more remains unavailable to me.

Surfing is like praying: I can neither make wind when it is calm, nor can I make contact with God when I pray. I can influence the conditions, with a little experience I can choose the right means, the right surfing material, but I cannot make the flow, it is given and I can only ask for it. I can take time to pray, prepare myself and be attentive, curious and open to what is given to me by God. It prays in me - or sometimes it doesn't.

Even when surfing, the contemplative dimension remains unavailable to me. Wind and water conditions are what they are. I cannot influence how the water moves beneath me, only go along with it and insert myself into its movement. I cannot influence how strong or from which direction the wind blows, only align my inner flag accordingly.

It is not always easy to accept this and, at best, to deal with it well. Sometimes there is a lull even in areas with a high probability of wind. It's no use hanging on to the sail just because I really want to surf. Instead, I'm guaranteed to fall into the water.

Even if I think I have chosen the right sail size for the prevailing conditions and have found my balance, it is only a matter of time before the next gust comes and I have to rebalance everything. Surfing is not static, it's a constant balancing act. You have to be flexible, attentive, expectant, with body tension and at the same time agile in order to be able to react at any time.

"The ocean does not know complete tranquillity - this also applies to the ocean of the life" (Mahatma Gandhi). Many people strive for a state of happiness that is as static as possible. But there is always something.

"You can't stop the waves - you can only learn to surf!"

What applies here to surfing students certainly also applies to us pastoral actors. How do we balance values and statements (what do we stand for?) and engage with people's reality (openness)?

3. THEN

If you want to windsurf or sail, you have to learn to orientate yourself to the wind. It is physically impossible to sail against the wind. And in order to steer and reach a goal, I simply have to know how to set the sail correctly.

I once had a surf student who kept drifting out in offshore winds. I went to him and explained that he had to swim back because he hadn't learned to steer yet. Every time he pulled up the sail, he would only go further out.

have an abortion. But he didn't want to believe me and insisted on making it. He didn't make it, of course, and had to be collected by boat.

Sometimes it is difficult to revise one's point of view and admit that one has gone off track or off course.

In water sports, a change of direction is called a change of course. It is important to know which course I am on in order to set the sail correctly.

We also want to literally "stay on course" in life, i.e. give our lives a direction and follow the planned path. To do this, I first have to determine a goal. If I don't succeed, I zigzag. In a figurative sense, this means an inconsistent approach without a clear goal. One is not in agreement with others or is inwardly torn oneself as to where one should actually go.

In our society, however, it is considered desirable to reach certain stations in life as quickly and as straightforwardly as possible.

But here the picture is lame! On the water, I can't keep the same course permanently. In most cases I have to change direction in between, especially if I don't just want to go from A to B, but want to go back to where I started. To do this, I even have to "turn up" again in a zigzag course because I can't go against the wind at all. In this case, the zigzag course has nothing at all to do with indecision. On the contrary: I even have to set myself very resolutely high but achievable goals and aim for them consistently.

In life, too, it can be worthwhile not always to continue single-mindedly on the chosen course, but to check one's orientation when there is a headwind, to change course if necessary and to accept a diversion. Sometimes, even in real life, the path does not lead directly to the destination, but only by crossing. That is, via ambitious but achievable intermediate goals. Sometimes I also have to zigzag in order to reach the desired point in the end.

You can learn a lot for life from surfing here:

The direct route is sometimes not possible. You can't go against the wind. Nor is it possible to go through a wall with your head.

If you slack off at the crossroads, you won't get there. Nor will those who constantly change their mind. Both on the water and on land: set achievable goals, look for unmoving landmarks, stay resolute.

Many participants have already taken these and similar "lessons-to-be-learned" from my courses into their lives.

What can you take with you into your life and work today, even without falling into the water and getting wet?

- Learn the language of those you are dealing with! And learn from them thought anew what you want to proclaim.
- Balance comes about in movement, in getting involved with the prevailing conditions, not in rigid concepts and theoretical plans. You fall into the water with stiff knees, but without body tension you can't convert the wind into propulsion either.
- You can ride against the wind - you just have to know how.

ALOHA!

Distribute TALER and ALOHA cards (*and music...*)