



# Christina Egelunds tale i anledning af Morten Meldals modtagelse af årets nobelpris i kemi

**Taler**

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**Sted**

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## 1 Exploring the unexpected

Well first of all thank you for the invitation to this amazing event.

- 5 I'm sure Henrik, that some of the political topics that you mentioned, that we will have many occasions – I promise you we will have many occasions to come back to that.

- 10 This is my very first time to give a speech since I was appointed as the new minister for higher education and science. I have really been looking forward to being here today – but must also admit that I got a little “sense of inferiority” when I heard it was at a Nobel Prize symposium.

- 15 Fortunately – this day isn't about me. It's about you, Morten – your colleagues and your impressive work and achievements!

Like many good stories – especially those surrounding science – this one starts with a coincidence.

- 20 If we go back 20 years in time – you were in fact trying to make a completely different reaction when click-chemistry revealed itself.

- 25 You had been doing familiar experiments with a highly reactive chemical group which in your own words: “danced about and was very eager to get rid of its energy” by reacting with the other components.

But nothing happened. Instead – a new substance was created – and it had even retained its energy for future use. One might say – that something had

30 “clicked”.

So how could this new observation be of use?

35 Well – by using copper as a catalyst you discovered that we could now create click-molecules. These can be used to combine other molecules in chemical processes that would otherwise be difficult to control. Click-chemistry can be used to build molecules – almost like building LEGO. Something that is now used in laboratories all over the world.

40 You had come by a major discovery by chance. But instead of disregarding the unexpected – you explored it.

Now – 20 years later – you Morten, Barry Sharpless and Carolyn Bertozzi got rewarded with a Nobel Prize in chemistry. A prize for your groundbreaking  
45 work with click-chemistry.

A big congratulations to the three of you!

50 A Nobel Prize is the highest professional recognition a scientist can get. It has been 25 years since the last time a Dane was awarded a Nobel Prize. And needless to say, that’s despite the vast amount of research that Danish scientists have performed throughout the years.

Johan Åqvist, Chair of the Nobel Committee of Chemistry said – and I quote:  
55 “This year’s Prize in Chemistry deals with not overcomplicating matters, instead working with what is easy and simple. Functional molecules can be built even by taking a straightforward route”.

60 The Nobel committee emphasized the simplicity and great applicability as a part of the reason behind your appointment.

And the application of science is crucial in a time where one crisis seems to replace the next. From financial crisis, to climate crisis, to energy crisis and famine. Many of these problems are in one way or another rooted in human  
65 behavior. And so are the solutions.

We can improve the world around us by utilizing the knowledge that people

70 like you – in this very room – work so hard to bring to light. Click-chemistry –  
this 20-year-old discovery – is a great example of how basic research can lead to  
numerous significant inventions at a later point in time.

Click-chemistry has many purposes. Everything from making paint that sticks  
better to the wall, to foods that last longer – something that could help  
75 minimize food waste in the long run.

It can also be used to test medicine more efficiently – in order to find better  
treatments for diabetes or cancer patients. Solutions that make life easier for  
some – and even possible for others.

80 Actually, click-chemistry has so many purposes – that listing them all would  
keep us busy for quite some time.

You have already been busy, Morten – throughout your scientific career.  
85 You have contributed to more than 300 publications, and obtained 21 patents.  
You’ve founded a company that performs biotechnological and pharmaceutical  
research using your own scientific discoveries.

You’ve even built two guitars. That’s also impressive.

90 But what perhaps says the most about your dedication to your field of work is  
the fact that you were back in the lecturing room with one of your classes at  
08.15 AM, the morning after your appointment.

95 And I’m not just mentioning this, because I am also the minister for higher  
education.

The University of Copenhagen, and the other Danish educational and research  
institutions deserve a mention on this joyful occasion.

100 They undertake world class research across a wide range of scientific areas. They  
are – together with our brilliant scientists – the reason behind the fantastic  
reputation Denmark holds worldwide when it comes to doing research.

105 People come from far and wide to be a part of the Danish research culture –  
because they recognize the quality of your work – as scientists – and as

universities. And that is something we can all be proud of.

110 The educational and research institutions also have another role of great importance. Around 23.000 graduate with a master's degree from the Danish universities – every year.

All of these students are a key part of our future. Some of them become  
115 scientists – some take other jobs – but they will all contribute to improving our society.

To me – learning – and teaching – are maybe the most essential parts of what it means to be a scientist.

120 To be baffled by the extraordinary things that happen around us. To be humbled by the things we don't know. To be curious all the time. And to transform complex scientific research into words that others – like me even – might understand. Something that is of great importance – yet easily forgotten.

125 I think you are a great example of these things Morten. And I believe you will be an inspiration for the future generations of curious minds who dare walk down the adventurous path of chemistry. Or something entirely different – but equally important.

130 In order to have a society in balance, we must remember the broad perspective – and all the other essential disciplines besides chemistry. You play in a band Morten – and you know – that all the instruments in the band must work together in order for the music to be in harmony. We must continue to be  
135 curious in order to learn from each other.

Standing here – talking about the future – I feel both uneasy and calm at the same time.

140 Uneasy because I realize, that there will be a lot of obstacles on our path forward. Obstacles that are complex in nature and difficult to solve. Obstacles such as inflation, global warming, biodiversity crisis, not to mention a war in Europe. Something I think none of us would have expected a few years ago.

145 But at the same time, I also feel a sense of calmness – because I know how many

sharp minds are gathered here today in celebration. Bright minds that are uncompromising in their work.

150 Minds that strive to change the world for the better – through enlightenment and reason – in a time where facts are often seen to be a matter of opinion.

Nerds – in the very best meaning of the word. Nerds – that continue to explore the unexpected, in order to make the world a better place for the rest of us.

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So once again – congratulations with the prize. To you Morten – and to all your colleagues – and the University of Copenhagen.

Thank you so much for your time!

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