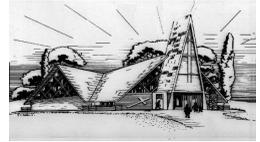




Free Evangelical Lutheran
Synod in South Africa

Sermon- Sunday Laetare Anyone in Christ is a new Creation!



St. John's Lutheran Parish Shelly Beach

• The Word of God for this Sermon is written in 2 Cor 5, 16-21:

- **ESV 16** From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.
 - **17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.
 - **18** All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;
 - **19** that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.
 - **20** Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.
 - **21** For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
- Let us pray: *Come Holy Spirit, open our ears, inspire in us the love for Your truth and a reconcile us fully with Yourself. Amen.*

• **Dear Beloved in Christ!**

- We can hear it in the words for today, *Laetare*, rejoice, Oh Jerusalem! Whilst the tone of last Sunday was stern warnings not to neglect and even grumble about the very good things God has given the Body of Christ, for this Sunday the tone is more on the new creation that God has installed amongst us, as the Holy Spirit writes through Paul.
- In Christ *God* was reconciling the world to Himself! This is a significant weighty proclamation! Do you hear it, God was doing it! Reconciliation with God does not work like this, that He merely informs us that now is the time that we need to reconcile ourselves with God. No. God reconciled Himself with the world. Reconciliation is His work alone, completely.
- We had a discussion once at the Seminary in Oberursel in Germany where someone was basically objecting to this. He reasoned, that this would mean that we would not love God with our own love, really coming from ourselves. In other words, how can that be authentic love? How can you love God when it is not originating from your own heart? This is a good point which reveals the out- of- this- worldliness of God's Reconciliation.
- What better example to illustrate the kind of reconciliation God practised in Christ can be found than the famous prodigal Son parable. Jesus proclaimed this parable to a mixed crowd of tax-collectors and sinners and the Pharisees who were grumbling

that Jesus received sinners and ate with them.

• The man had two sons. The younger one asked his father to give him the share of property that was coming to him. The father was not dead yet, but the younger one wanted his fair share of goods. The father divided the property and gave the inheritance allocated to the younger one to him. But, then the younger one decided to leave the father and make a journey. He took all his possessions with him and on the way squandered it in **“reckless living”**. No need to expand on that term too much. We know what happened: Too much wine, women and song!

• And God added something more to his troubled life when He allowed the famine to strike the region he was in. He began to be in need! The initial party was over, the party he gave to himself, with the goods of his father, and now he was in need. No money, no wine, no women, no song. And when he became so much in need, Jesus says he joined himself to one of the citizens of the region. He hired himself out to him, who sent him into the fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to just eat something the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything! And having come to himself, when he came to his senses, he said, **“How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!”** He would rise and go to his father, and he would say the following to his father. He planned his speech, which he would present before his father: **“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”** He is in repentance. He will admit that he is not worthy to be called “son” any more. He knows that. He just wants to be treated like one of the fathers hired servants, because they are far better off than anyone selling himself to the citizens of the world.

• So, he went and came to his father. He was going to try and apologise as good as he could, not expecting to be son any more. Then it says, **“while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.”** One of the most beautiful pictures of God embracing sinners, who return to Him confessing their sins! What was this man doing, what are sinners confessing their sins doing: They admit that they didn’t love the father as they should have! The son came back to his father to at least be better off than in his fallen state. It was not love for the father that was driving him. That was lacking. It was still selfish of him. He wanted a better life for himself amongst the workers of his father.

• But the **father loved His son**, and had never stopped loving him! The father turns this story on it’s head. He goes completely overboard! It’s as if he didn’t really listen to the weak apologies of his fallen son, **“Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.”** A huge welcome feast for such a lousy sinner, who squandered his fathers possessions before he even died! The older son

evaluated it exactly like this and protested against the fathers abounding generosity towards this squanderer of inheritance.

• But the father saw the coming back of the younger one differently [24]: ***For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.*** It is fitting to celebrate and be glad.

• Now, let's return to our initial question: you see, the older son is accusing the father of reconciling with someone who revealed that he hadn't loved his father. He was not worthy to be son. Is it love to abandon your father and then come back only when it really goes bad? Is that love to the father? Surely love is remaining with the father and serving him constantly. Do you see, this is not about the fallen sons love to the father! Rather, this parable reveals God's Love to His children who have abandoned Him, who have drifted away from Him! How will He receive them, should they ever turn back to Him? Answer: He runs to them and embraces them and makes a feast out of the return!

• That is what Paul proclaims, God reconciled Himself with the world. It is completely from God's side. We didn't love God with anything that originated in ourselves. Any love we have for God comes from Him! It is generated, it is created in us by God's reconciliation with us! Here we have to see that nobody is excluded: God has reconciled Himself with the world, all worst sinners included! Did He wait until they loved Him? No. He did not count their trespasses against them! There trespasses were real, but He did not count them against them. They are free of the guilt of their sins.

• God was in Christ, on the cross, and reconciled Himself with the world. This is a fact, a reality, a new creation that God started in Christ! What remains now is to ask, how does this come to the people? Where is this reconciliation actually handed over to the sinner?

• The answer is: In Christ. Those in Christ have received the ministry of reconciliation. The Word of Reconciliation was established, was set up, was instituted amongst us. This word needs to be proclaimed. It needs to go out and hand out God's reconciliation. As Paul said, ***"we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."*** Reconciliation is not your work, but come and allow God to reconcile Himself with you.

• God's only begotten Son, who knew no sin, was made to be sin, for our sakes, so that you and I, real sinners before God, might become the righteousness of God, in Christ.

• If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation! Did you get that? You are a new creation in God. Present tense reality! Rejoice, oh Jerusalem! The old has passed away! It is already as good as gone. It's phasing out. Only God creates the new. Whatever originates from man and is sold as "new" is in fact old and passing away, as is the case with all fads and new measures people make up and sell as gospel.

- However, we can only receive the new creation through God's ambassadors! God's reconciliation is handed out by means of the ministry of reconciliation. God makes His appeal through His people whom He sent to be ambassadors. This is where many people are confused in our days. They reckon, because the Word is proclaimed through a human being it must be human doctrine! Then they run to someone who claims to hear the Holy Spirit speaking directly in his heart, without testing the spirit against the Word of God. The Holy Spirit guides people to church, yes, but the proclamation of the Gospel is left for God's servants to proclaim!
- A good example is the conversion of the eunuch travelling back to Ethiopia. The Holy Spirit called Philip all the way from the mission field to this eunuch reading Isaiah. Philip proclaimed to the man that Isaiah was speaking about Jesus. The Holy Spirit did not speak to the man directly. He could have just let the man understand, but He didn't do it that way. He called Philip away from the mission-field to proclaim the Gospel to this man on the deserted road!
- The new creation is created through the proclaimed Word of reconciliation, spoken from person to person. Wherever this Word is heard, the old has passed away; behold the new has come. It is so effective that from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh! What does this mean? As new creation we get a new mind. We look with new eyes. We see things differently, and especially we see others around us with minds informed by God's Word! We don't see sinners around us any more, here in Christ, we see God's new creation. Look around you! We see the Body of Christ around us, people filled with the Word of God's reconciliation! Once we have heard it, it is in us. Only if we reject it, does it leave us.
- We see brothers and sisters in Christ around us here in God's Service, the new creation of God, the Body of Christ, and all around us, in our communities, those people are prodigal sons of God! The Word of Reconciliation has been fulfilled. Also for them. It is done. Who is going to tell them? There is a heavenly Father waiting for them with compassion! God's reconciliation gives us the necessary insight and power to reconcile with others and see them as the heavenly Father sees them!
- And so we rejoice, Lætare, with God, today, because of His mercy and love He has given to all sinful prodigal sons, including ourselves. We rejoice with God in Christ because He has created a new creation amongst us. The old has passed away, behold, see, the new has come and still comes!
- Praise be to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit! **Amen.**

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **Amen.***