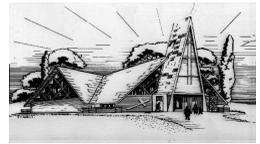




Free Evangelical Lutheran
Synod in South Africa

Sermon - 20th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 22C)

The Kingdom of God deals with sin effectively!



St. John's Lutheran Parish Shelly Beach

• The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Luke 17, 1-10:

- **1** Then He said to his disciples, "It is impossible for stumbling blocks not to come; nevertheless, woe through whom they come."
- **2** "It is more advantageous for him if a millstone is placed around his neck and he had been thrown into the sea than that he causes to stumble one of these little ones."
- **3** "Beware for yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him."
- **4** "And if seven times a day he sins against you and seven times he turns to you saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."
- **5** And the apostles said to the Lord, "Add to us faith."
- **6** But the Lord said, "If you have faith as a grain of mustard, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."
- **7** "And who of you, having a slave ploughing and tending sheep, who when he comes in out of the field, will say to him, 'Come immediately and recline at table?'"
- **8** On the contrary, will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare what I will eat, and, girding yourself, serve me until I eat and drink, and after these things, you will eat and drink?'"
- **9** Is he grateful to the slave because he did the commanded things?"
- **10** So also you, when you do all the things that are commanded of you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; what we ought to have done, we have done.'"
- *Let us pray: Come Holy Spirit, open our ears and our hearts and create in us a new heart of faith and mercy towards our brothers! Amen.*

• **Dear Congregation in Christ!**

- What is the opposite of seeking vengeance? Seeking vengeance befalls us when someone hurts us, in whatever way, and we want to pay back that person. This is no small thing we are talking about here. Many wars have started because of this attitude of our old Adam.
- As Christians, we know, that vengeance belongs to God alone, but we often fall into this desire to retaliate when someone really hurts us. Our first reaction is to hit back with the tongue or by physical force!
- Teaching His disciples, Jesus gives to them an alternative to vengeance: You should forgive them! Again, we know this. We have heard it so often. As Christians, we should forgive!
- But, what does this entail, how far does this go? In general, we think:

Forgiveness, yes, for the first time someone hurts us or damages our possessions, no problem. And maybe a second time, but when this same thing happens a third time, we are quick to ask or think: Where is this leading to? How far can one, should one go! Is this person really so weak? Is he/she actually sorry about what he/she did? Somewhere this has to end.

- Therefore, we ask, Jesus, teach us the way of Your forgiveness through Your Word!
- Now, we have to keep in mind the main things regarding the parables of the prodigal son and the parable of Lazarus and the rich man: God leads us to repentance through circumstances and through the teaching of His Law. The main thing is that we hear the absolution, that we receive the mercy of God. This mercy of God we should not hold back from others but share it with all the poor in the Spirit. This we need to keep in mind.
- Jesus begins by acknowledging that temptations or better, stumbling blocks, will always be a reality for His “little ones”, for the poor in spirit, for those who are weak in the battle against sin, for the tax-collectors and sinners. In this regard He speaks His first woe-warning to His disciples: Woe through whom the stumbling blocks come to the ‘little ones’. What exactly does He mean? He explains by saying [3]: ***“Beware for yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.”***
- Notice what happens here. This is unheard of: If your *brother* sins, against you, *you* have to beware of yourself! He sins, yet I have to watch what I do with his sinning against me, so that I won’t be a stumbling block for him! One would like to ask, who is the guy in trouble here, is it me or him, who sins against me? That is the Kingdom of God!
- Jesus says, if he sins against you, rebuke him! Yes, we should show him his fault! We need to hear this in our day and age. There is something like wrong and there is something like right. If something is wrong, we should not water it down with words like “challenge” etc. If it is wrong it is wrong and we should point it out to our brother. Sin is evil and dangerous. In the end it kills. Therefore, we cannot just leave it! Real sins have to be addressed between members of Christ. Sins need to be addressed so that

they can be forgiven!

- So, this works both ways, we should on the one hand not feel offended if someone comes to us and speaks to us about something we have done wrong. Listen carefully and if you were in the wrong, ask for forgiveness immediately. The moment you ask for forgiveness he has to forgive you! That is what Jesus commands His disciples! If someone says, “I repent” or ‘please forgive me’ a disciple of Christ has to forgive him or her! In such a case we, as disciples of Christ, should not withhold forgiveness from one another, else we could cause someone to stumble, we could cause someone to be driven to despair!
- There are no exceptions in this regard! Even if it is more than twice a day for the same sin? Jesus says even if it is seven times a day, that is always, for the same sin! You shall forgive him or her!
- You have to share Christ’s mercy with them! Forgiveness does not belong to us! Jesus owns forgiveness, because He paid for it with His ministry starting with His baptism, suffering and fulfilling it with His death! Being His disciples means, that He has forgiven us and will always forgive us whenever we repent, whenever we ask Him for this mighty wonderful gift!
- We should also not doubt the repentance of someone, if he really means it or not, as we learned from the parable of the lost son. If someone comes to us and asks for repentance we should see it as an opportunity to hand out Christ’s mercy!
- Jesus wants a church where forgiveness of sins reigns. If someone asks for it, it should be given to him or her, so that none of the weak, who battle with sin, who fall into it, time and again, will get stuck with it, but will always be able to have it removed from their conscience!
- We need to apply this also to our family life. This is where we know each others weaknesses and sins so very well. As disciples of Christ we are not allowed to be stingy with handing out forgiveness! As we pray the Lord’s Prayer in the evenings let us remember that it addresses exactly this:
“Forgive us our tresspasses as we forgive those who trespass against us!”

Therefore, it is good Christian custom or tradition to close off the day with a devotion and the Lord's Prayer so that we can go to bed with a good conscience and have a good nights rest!

- To be able to live a life of forgiveness and peace we need trust in the ministry of Jesus! That is why the Apostles asked their Lord: ***“Add to us faith!”*** Indeed, faith in the Lord Jesus' Exodus, His Crucifixion and Resurrection empowers people to share with others the very mercy they have received! We know this faith comes through hearing His Word!
- As we are enabled to forgive, even if we would be able to forgive each other seven times a day we should not misuse this gift of Christ to build up our selves! Forgiving one another, always, is what is required of a disciple! It does not make out of us *worthy* disciples. We should not count it as a good work because we only did what was required of us!
- We should still say: ***‘We are unworthy slaves; what we ought to have done, we have done.’***
- Disciples of Jesus are humble because they realise that, without Christ, we cannot do anything! This great and wonderful gift which creates a peaceful community, a community where sin is dealt with effectively. Note: Sin is not swept under the carpet by trying to making the Law of God harmless. Neither is sin not just revealed and screamed at, but it is *overcome*. Millstones of burdens are loosened and thrown into the sea. People are freed from their guilty consciences. What a great relief! Freedom from sin!
- The opposite of vengeance is to carry each others burdens until repentance and forgiveness deal with evil effectively. Whilst we are unworthy slaves Jesus is the worthy Son of God. The forgiveness He gives is real and reliable every single time! It brings true Life and Salvation! **Amen.**
- *Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. **Amen.** (^{ESV} Eph 3,20-21).*