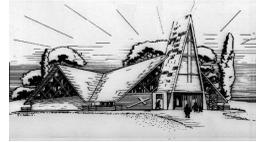




Free Evangelical Lutheran  
Synod in South Africa

## Sermon – First Sunday of Trinity (Proper 3C)

Blessed are the poor, for yours is the  
Kingdom of God!



St. John's Lutheran Parish Shelly Beach

### • The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Luke 6, 20-36:

• <sup>ESV</sup> 20 And he (*Jesus*) lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

• 21 "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.

• 22 "Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!

• 23 Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.

• 24 "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

• 25 "Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. "Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

• 26 "Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

• 27 "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,

• 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

• 29 To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either.

• 30 Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back.

• 31 And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

• 32 "If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.

• 33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.

• 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount.

• 35 But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.

• 36 Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

• ***Let us pray: Come Holy Spirit, open our ears and our hearts, make us Your good trees which will yield Your good fruit! Amen.***

### • **Dear Congregation in Christ!**

• Jesus says today, blessed are the poor and woe to the rich! What does He mean by this? Does this mean, as some, even commentaries, have concluded, that Jesus always sides with the poor whilst the rich are simply out! Is that what Jesus is saying?

- If one does not pay attention to the context, to the rest of Luke and so on, this would be one's conclusion with devastating consequences. Because what comes out then is what drove the liberation theology, namely that the poor in financial terms are right, whilst the financially rich are always wrong!
- In the following chapter we hear about a centurion, who had a servant, who was sick, and he called for Jesus through the elders of the Jews, to please come and heal his servant. The elders of the Jews remarked the following saying, please Lord, come, for this man is worthy to be helped because he loves our nation and has built us our synagogue! This centurion was a rich man. He had servants and enough money to build a whole synagogue! And it is of him that Jesus says [Lk 7,9]: *"I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith!"* But he was a rich man, financially! How does this fit with *"wæ to the rich"*?
- Jesus admired the faith of this man, why? Because of what he spoke to Jesus [Lk 7,6-7]: *"Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy to have You come under my roof. Therefore I did not presume to come to You. But say the word, and let my servant be healed."* This man did not agree with the Jews who counted him as worthy. He says, 'no I am not worthy for Jesus to come to my house'. Why did the Jews count him as worthy? They said, because the centurion loved their nation and built a synagogue for them.
- This is very significant: 'The centurion does not say, Lord, Lord, I love the nation of Israel and I have even built a synagogue for them. I think I am worthy that you come and heal my servant, because I have done what you said, namely share my possessions with others!' In stark contrast the centurion confesses and says: *"Lord, do not trouble yourself, I am not worthy ..."*. If one would go along with how the liberation ideology interprets our sermon passage this would not fit in, because in this example Jesus clearly takes the side of the financially rich man and not the side of the poor Jews, who couldn't build a synagogue themselves! The financially rich centurion spoke rightly, whilst they, the poor, erred!
- So, what does Jesus mean with "poor", what does He mean with "rich" and then finally we ask what does He mean with "love" and how does poor and rich and love fit together?
- We take note of the context wherein this Word of Jesus is spoken: Directly after our sermon passage follows the very important teaching by Jesus saying that only a good tree can produce good fruit. A natural thorn tree does not yield figs! Only a fig tree will yield figs. *"The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, ..."* says Jesus. You need a good heart to be good and to produce good. What is Jesus speaking of when He refers to producing good? It follows from the rest of His Word: *"for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."* Heart and mouth are linked! What you speak gives you away, reveals if you are good or bad person, shows if your heart is good or bad!
- Applied to the centurion and the Jewish elders, the centurion knew his unworthiness and confessed it to Jesus, but nevertheless called on Jesus to help his servant, and he asked Jesus to simply **speak** to heal him. So, what was in his heart? He knew that he was poor in the sense of poor in worthiness before Jesus. But he trusted in the mercy of Jesus and in the

power of His word: 'Speak one word!' And he was blessed by Jesus! Blessed are the poor ... said Jesus! So this centurion was such a poor man in the sense Jesus takes it, namely as poor in worthiness before Jesus!

- The elders of the Jews on the other hand revealed how their hearts were evaluating worthiness, namely, loving their nation and doing something for their church!
- Then if we go look before our sermon passage the calling of the tax-collector Levi is significant for our word of today. Levi was also a rich man, as he invited Jesus to his house and made a great feast together with a large company of tax-collectors. It was at this occasion that the Pharisees and scribes grumbled at Jesus' disciples saying: *"Why do you eat with tax-collectors and sinners?"* Then Jesus significantly answered them as follows: *"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick."* And He explains what He means by saying then: *"I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."*
- Sickness is a metaphor or image of sinfulness. In the same way poor refers to poor in the spirit. The rich are those who think that they don't need Christ, who reckon they can master their own lives, like the Pharisees and scribes. They assumed that worthiness depended on their ancestry. They assumed to possess the kingdom of God because of who they were according to their fleshly decendency and because they kept the Sabbath. The centurion knew he had no right to ask Jesus to help him. He was simply hoping for the mercy of Jesus. He was not asking Jesus to be present. Jesus is holy, he was not, but His Word alone would suffice. And that is the faith that honours Jesus!
- And dear congregation, this faith shows itself very clearly in the way one treats one's enemies! Loving your friends, sharing with people from whom you can expect something back is standard practice in the world! That is nothing extraordinary! You don't need the Holy Spirit for doing so! But Jesus says the following [35]: *"Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, ..."* Love your enemies- now that is radical. Jesus does not only say "tolerate them", no, He says "love them". That is, in its fulfilled form, be prepared to die for the sake of your enemies! Now that is stretching it. Are you prepared to sacrifice your life for one of your enemies?
- Then Jesus also goes to our money matters, which is often our hidden sacred cow, and he says, lend money without expecting a return! How am I going to survive is the question we grumble in ourselves. And by the way Jesus does not allow His disciples to beg from other people! So, how am I going to survive? Now this requires faith in the Lord's promises. That is faith in action! Trusting in His promises that He will provide!
- If you argue with yourself like this, 'you know this person, I cannot give him/her anything, neither my time nor money, because he/she does not deserve it', you forget or deny that the Lord is kind to the ungrateful and evil! That is mind-blowing, even unfair, we might think! Yet, that is what Jesus accomplished and fulfilled in His sacrifice on the Cross! That is the Spirit of Jesus! That is agape-love!

• So, are you rich in this Spirit? Or are you poor with regard to having this Spirit? Are you going to try and defend your poor actions regarding your enemies with some lame excuses, or are you going to repent of your actions? That is the question! As we hear Jesus' Word this morning He puts us on the spot! How have we been treating our enemies in our hearts! That is the question.

• There is this idea floating around which says that Jesus does not ask of us to like our enemies, as long as we tolerate them, as long as we help them. This idea is false according to this clear Word of Jesus! It is trying to find an escape route for our old Adam! But Jesus won't give us one. There is no escape. Our poverty in the Spirit is revealed by our unmerciful desires and actions against our enemies! This is not according to the Spirit of Jesus! Jesus is kind to the ungrateful and evil.

• So, Jesus drives us towards repentance! That is the only faithful thing we can do! Repent of your nasty desires and actions against your enemies!

• And then ... call on Jesus to give you of His Spirit! Not because we are worthy, but because of Jesus' promise, *"blessed are the poor"*! This Word of Jesus, that He is kind to the ungrateful and evil, applies to you and to me, too! Now His Word lights up, blessed are the poor! Now this Word becomes life-giving to us! You who hunger for the righteousness of Christ, you who weep now over hating your enemies hear this, blessed are you, for Jesus is present here today, in our midst, to help the real sinners! He says, blessed are you!

• That is radical too! Extraordinary help from an extraordinary Saviour! Therefore, standing on this rock of Jesus' blessing, which we have received today, with our minds being recalibrated, being renewed with Jesus' Spirit, with His attitude, we go out of this Divine Service quite different than when we came in. We go out with a new attitude towards all people! Now we want to live accordingly. We want to be kind and show mercy even to those who are ungrateful and evil! Yes, even in our times of turmoil! Don't this times need this attitude more than anything else? Practice it ! It is not our mercy. We are just handing out what we have received today!

• Don't expect to be loved by the world for doing this. Jesus has another blessing ready for that case: *"Blessed are you when men hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!"* And here also Jesus goes right over the Top when He says [23]: *"Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven."* Amen.

• *Let us pray:* Lord, give us of your wonderful Spirit and help us to practice Your mercy in the coming days and weeks, in our congregation, families and communities! **Amen.**

• *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. (2 Cor 13,14)*