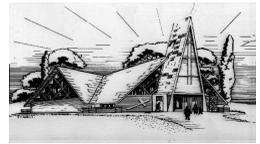




Free Evangelical Lutheran
Synod in South Africa

Sermon - Day of Fulfilment

The Fullness of God in Christ!



St. John's Lutheran Parish Shelly Beach

• The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Luke 23, 27-43:

• **ESV 27** And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him.

• **28** But turning to them Jesus said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.

• **29** For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!'

• **30** Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.'

• **31** For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

• **32** Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him.

• **33** And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.

• **34** And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments.

• **35** And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!"

• **36** The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine

• **37** and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"

• **38** There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

• **39** One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

• **40** But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"

• **41** And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."

• **42** And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

• **43** And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

• Let us pray: *Come Holy Spirit, open our ears and our hearts for Your wonderful message, crucify our old Adam and comfort and build up the new man of faith in us. Amen.*

• **Dear Congregation in Christ!**

• The Day of Fulfilment is one way of referring to this Last Sunday of the Church Year. Fulfilment. Making full our needs! Searching for fulfilment in our lives! Deep, deep down we are all yearning for fulfilment! If we are hungry we go and find some food. When we are thirsty, we go to find some water. When we are tired, we lie down to sleep.

• Yet, we know that basically fulfilling the desires of our body is not all we need. We can have all the food and drinks of the world to our disposal and we can still be unfulfilled! We can still be empty. We can have as much money as we want, and we will still be unhappy. Our soul will still be restless. There are many more things that we need to give us peace, to fulfil us. We need others to trust us. We need to be loved, we need to belong somewhere. We need community, inspiring conversations, friendships and table-fellowship with others! Above all, we as Christians know that we need to be under God's reign of Grace!

• We can also say it like this: we need to find paradise! Paradise stands for all these things. In paradise Adam and Eve were living in the sanctuary of God, the Garden God created for them. They were living in peace with one another and in peace with God and with creation. They were completely holy and therefore they could always be in God's presence of Grace.

• They could eat of all the trees of the garden including the tree of life. In this way they could have lived forever, because the tree of life was giving them life. We know that this didn't happen, because of the Fall into sin. Eve first and then Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. They were deceived into desiring and doing something which God had strictly forbidden. They fell into it, like we fall into sin, we are getting pulled into it, we drift into it, and then God had a problem to solve. He couldn't allow Adam and Eve to remain with Him in His sanctuary, because then they could have carried on to eat of the tree of life and they would have survived in their corrupt state, forever. Besides this, they could not any longer remain in the presence of the holy God, in whom there is no darkness at all. And that is why they had to be driven out of paradise, out of God's sanctuary and the Seraphim were placed to guard the way to the tree of life!

• Access to the tree of life, in the middle of God's sanctuary, in the middle of paradise, was cut off!

• We can also say it like this, the forever- young possibility was abruptly ended! Death came into the world. Suddenly eternal Life was out of reach for fallen human kind! The fact that our bodies age and die after maximum around a hundred and twenty years is a direct result from this Fall into sin.

• What effect does this have on us as human beings? Even from psychology we know about collective traumatic experiences! Severe collective experiences of a nation in the past can have a long-lasting effect for generations to come! For example the traumatic experience of a terrible war like the Second World War or even something like the Boer- War takes decades to overcome.

• Now, consider what a massive traumatic experience the Fall into sin must have been! The one moment they were living in paradise, living together with the holy Father, didn't know anything evil like death, the next moment they were out in the

cold and harsh environment of a fierce and corrupt society and nature! They had lost everything that was good!

• That is why whenever we hear the story of the Fall into sin, most of mankind can relate to that story! We know what fall into sin means! Our desires override our clear thinking! We know about being deceived. We know that when we fall and are exposed our first reaction is to push the blame away from ourselves. This initial Fall sits deep in our bones and flesh, minds and desires! That is what Paul means when he speaks about our old Adam. We all share the same collective traumatic experience with all of humankind! It has become our nature to practice intentional forgetting- we try to push this away from us! In this way we try to get this ultra traumatic experience out of our consciousness and being. But, even if we might temporarily succeed in pushing it out, the consequences of our fall remain! Broken trust and broken relationships and within ourselves a deep seated feeling of guilt and fear.

• The devastating loss Adam and Eve experienced still affects us. Deep down we are hunting for the lost paradise! We long for that ultimate fulfilment. We are traumatised because we have lost something very essential! A whole world consisting of broken people! A whole world chasing after paradise, hopeful to find it somewhere and somehow. Many have become hopeless basically living in despair, because they didn't find something that resembles the lost paradise they are looking for.

• The big question is, where is paradise to be found? What is the real paradise? Many look for it in nature. They work hard to spend their free time in beautiful places. Enjoy nature! Others try to find the ideal partner- they hope that when they find the perfect match the honeymoon will never end. Most, I would say, expect to find it in some religion. They long to experience the divine, the godly, but they assume that good feelings must be the manifestation of the divine.

• Many others, who are more materialistically minded, simply try to built their own paradise!

• Now as God-fearing people, we know we cannot come past the Seraphim. What was beneath the Seraphim in the Holy of Holies in God's temple? The Ark of the Covenant. And inside the Ark of the Covenant? The Ten Commandments, a flask of Manna and Aaron's staff! If we as humankind wanted God's paradise back on earth it would have been necessary that all people would keep all Ten Commandments to the full! Access to God's sanctuary is prohibited unless God's Will is fulfilled in us! The Kingdom of God is the place where His sacred Will is kept to the full! That is where paradise is!

• Now, we as Christians believe, teach and confess that in Christ God has provided us the true way to eternal Life. Jesus is the way, the truth and eternal Life. So, Jesus must be the way past the Seraphim, past the fulfilment of the Ten

Commandments, giving us access to the tree of Life!

• This takes us to the Word of today, the Word of the Cross. What happened there? In the most unlikely place, on the place of the skull, surrounded by the punishment of sin, death, a place entrenched in blood and death, paradise is mentioned by Jesus! The sinner hanging next to him, who confessed his sinfulness and Jesus' innocence receives the best news anyone can hear, [43] *"Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."* Paradise is not only talked about, Jesus hands it out. The sinner, who is not in denial any more, but confesses his own sinfulness and affirms the punishment inflicted on himself asked Jesus a mighty thing [42]: *"Jesus, remember me when you come into Your kingdom."* What a place to speak about paradise and even to hand it out to someone hanging next to Him!

• Earlier on Jesus spoke another very significant Word whilst hanging on the cross [34]: *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* Included in this "they" is all of humankind, because we all participated in crucifying Him because of our sins! We are part of the Fall and part of those whom Jesus prayed for!

• This is a mighty Word Jesus spoke on the cross. Not long after that He died on the cursed pole. ***And the Father forgave us!*** Since that day, forgiveness is available. The curtains in the temple separating sinful human beings from the presence of God's Grace were ripped open! Access to God's sanctuary, to God's paradise is possible! In fact the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit come to us to forgive us our sins, to teach us, to lead us to repentance and so that we long for the Grace of God.

• From the most unlikely place on earth, at the place of the skull, access to paradise is handed out to those who have been crucified together with Jesus. And we know God instituted Baptism where our old Adam is crucified with Jesus, so that we will also live with Him in paradise! There is a vivid picture of Your Baptism. You are the person hanging on the right of Jesus. Since Baptism created faith in you, the doors of paradise are open.

• And those who have received the teaching of Law and Gospel, when they sin, after Baptism, may come again and receive this forgiveness and may go to the table of the Lord to eat the holy meal Christ has prepared for them. They are prepared by the Lord, made ready, made holy, to finally leave this earth for paradise, should the Father call them home!

• This is the truth, because the Lord Jesus died as your Christ for you, and He said so! ***Amen.***

• *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. [Phil 4,7].*