

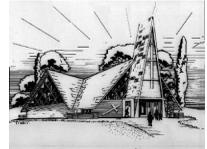


Free Evangelical Lutheran  
Synod in South Africa

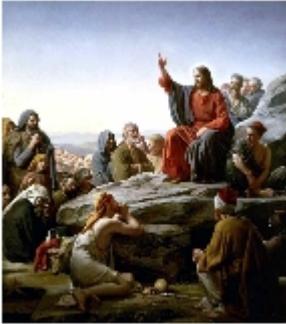
## Sermon for Sexagesimae (Proper Epiphany 5A)

*Jesus says: "You are the light of the world!"*

St. John's Lutheran Parish



Shelly Beach



- The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Mt 5, 13-20:
- <sup>ESV 13</sup> "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.
- <sup>14</sup> "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.
- <sup>15</sup> Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.
- <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your

Father who is in heaven.

- <sup>17</sup> "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.
- <sup>18</sup> For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.
- <sup>19</sup> Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.
- <sup>20</sup> For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.
- *Let us pray: Come Holy Spirit, open our ears and our hearts so that the light of Jesus will enlighten us so that we will shine His light in our communities! Amen.*

### • Dear Beloved of the Father!

- Is not our whole existence here on earth marked by a fight against death and evil? Humankind fights with all it has against everything and everyone that threatens its life and the existence of its loved ones. Humanism does this to extend its life at all costs! And, to not loose heart, it believes and makes the claim of evolution of the human being, that humanity is steadily busy to progress towards becoming more human ...
- In another kingdom, of another world, Jesus says, blessed are the poor in spirit ... and today we hear, "you are the salt of the earth...", "you are the light of the world!"
- On the one hand the disciples of Jesus are nothing but on the other hand they are so valuable, for the whole world! The poor in spirit are the merciful, the pure in heart, peacemakers but they will be persecuted for righteousness sake. They will be reviled, not because they are poor or useless, but because these poor ones will confess Christ Jesus as only Saviour and provider of all blessings! He is the One, the only One, who brings the

kingdom of God to the poor in spirit.

• This is where the world took and still today takes offence in the disciples of Christ, because humankind is in denial of being poor in the spirit! The more religious and pious people claim to be, the worse it gets. That is why the Sanhedrin, the Jewish elite, rejected Jesus! They assumed to already be the sons of God, because of their rich heritage! They were Jews by natural birth! They considered themselves to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, because they knew the Torah, the Law of God! They were not sitting in darkness- they knew the Law. So, they reasoned!

• But Jesus came and brushed aside all of that and, in their eyes, blessed the wrong guys! Those who were worst positioned to receive the knowledge of how to fulfil the Law of God, of how to build a perfect Israel on earth, Jesus went and called them! He blessed the wrong people! He doesn't seem to know what He is doing. That is what the Sanhedrin concluded!

• Today, we are removed some 2000 years since Christ spoke His sermon the first time! Have we left those times behind? Have we outgrown or out-evolved this issue?

• I have come across a stunning article called "Luther and humanism". In this article Prof. Slenczka shows that precisely this issue lies at the very centre of the dispute between the pope, his humanistic theologians, especially Erasmus and Luther himself. And, we have to be honest and say, the position of the pope and his theologians has, in modern times, infiltrated and overcome most confessions and theologians of the present day church!

• Let me explain: In 1520 Luther wrote a sentence which was especially pulled out and condemned by the pope. This sentence is rejected by most mainline churches, including all Pentecostal and Charismatic churches who subscribe to decision theology.

• He wrote the following (my translation): *'The free will (of man) after the Fall into sin is a thing that only has a name, yet it is without content, and as long as a human being does what is in him, he commits mortal sin.'*

• Why were those words so offensive to the pope and why are they still today so very offensive to theologians, to the whole prosperity movement and human rights activists alike? What's the matter with that statement?

• To understand why this is such an explosive statement, we have to realise what these people want to achieve with their theology, with their prosperity claims, with their human rights? What are they marching for?

• According to humanism, everything turns around the human being and his actions. What is the ideal of humanism: To evolve humankind to the next level of becoming truly human. How do they want to achieve this: through human rights, enforced worldwide! That is what they fight for!

• What about the pope and the churches? They want the same, of course with the help of God! *But, what role do they subscribe to God or Christ to play in achieving worldwide peace?* He mainly has to act as the coach who gives the right instructions how to achieve this transformation of the communities. And therefore, the sermon of the mount of Jesus is often used as a blueprint of Christian training. Worldwide Christians must be trained through sermons in small groups etc. to follow the words of Jesus so that peace and

prosperity can be achieved in this world. Churches are training grounds to activate and infiltrate the world, to fall in with this noble endeavour to make a better world, here on earth! It sounds great doesn't it?

• But, according to Luther, following the Apostle Paul, there is nothing good in man, that is in his self. This seemingly noble endeavour of achieving a better world cannot work, because man cannot do it! This ideal of a rainbow world rests on a far too enthusiastic understanding of human kind. The true radicalism of human depravity is not part of the equation. Luther denies what the pope and all movements of glory and humanists alike try to achieve as *mortal sin!* This is indeed a very radical statement.

• If we now come back to the sermon on the mount: Whom does Jesus bless, and what is He doing, when He does this? Is Jesus only acting as the coach of the disciples whom He called? Is He standing on the sideline and tells them what to do and how to make a better world?

• What is He doing? He blesses them, and we learned that it means that He speaks salvation onto them! What did they do? They followed Him. They didn't ask for a blessing. They are the spiritually poor. They simply have received what Christ gave to them.

• Very important, Christ not only acts as the coach on the sideline: He is the living Lord who, as He speaks, makes them into His disciples. He begins to create His new people right there! He creates the new within the old.

• HE DOES NOT TRANSFORM THE OLD TO BECOME THE NEW!! He unites them to Himself by remaining with them! He assigns His newness, His blessing, to them! He bespeaks His light onto them. He is the main actor. He is not at all on the sideline. He goes in front to the Cross and achieves what they would never be able to achieve, namely peace with God. And even when they stopped following Him at the Cross, He, after His Resurrection came back to them and again spoke the peace of God onto them. Without Jesus' action and continued action His disciples would have completely lost it. Jesus builds the new nation through His Word!

• It is true for us too: Without Jesus' action and continued action in our lives through His Word and through His means of Grace every single one of us would have lost it! It is true, we are the poor in Spirit! No matter how much we try, our building of a rainbow nation turns out to be hell!

• Does that mean preaching resignation, as many theologians accused Luther of doing? Does this promote not caring for the community or politics at all? Far from it!

• As despair wants to set in, because we realise that Jesus really means what He says, that we should deny our self's, Jesus comes with another surprise and says to each one of you today [13]: *"You are the salt of the earth ... you are the light of the world ..."*. Dear congregation, these are just as radical words as those concerning our self. Just when one thinks, we are completely worthless- lets go sit in the corner and be passive- Jesus comes and gives us a worthiness and a purpose for this life which goes far beyond what one can imagine.

• He really means every syllable of those words too. Notice, how He says *"you are ..."*- that's totally unbreakable. If He says, *"you are..."*, then you are ... that which gives salt to

the earth. Jesus has spoken something onto you. He has put something in your ears and the Holy Spirit puts it into your hearts and this Blessing of His is the salt of the earth. This is what the earth needs, to be cleansed of evil. They need to hear that they are the poor in the spirit- in other words, they need to be led to repentance, and at the same time they need to hear that they need not despair, because Jesus says, blessed are the poor in Spirit. It is the same as : Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.

• You are indeed the light of this world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. It is impossible to hide a city on a hill! Trying to do so is absurd. In the same way, you, dear congregation, are not hidden. If you are trying to hide that you are a Christian, stop doing it, people know it in any case. You cannot hide the light that is in you. People know and see what you do and say. They notice that you go to church on Sundays. In any case, a light which is switched on at night is meant to shine. It is absurd to put it under a basket! No, you put it on a stand so that it can give as much light as possible!

• In the same way, 'shine your lights' says Jesus! Confess the truth, in love! He is the giver of light. It belongs to Him. He can say to you: shine! You may shine! He wants you to shine! Yes, we Lutherans have to come out of our cosy confessional corners and shine the light that was entrusted to us! Its not ours. So, share it!

• This is truly mind-boggling. According to our old nature, we are nothing, we are poor in the spirit. We deny ourselves. There is nothing good in us, that is in our flesh. We don't need positive thinking! What is positive about us? What life is there to celebrate if our life, all by ourselves, is poor in the spirit?

• And yet, at the same time, we are blessed beyond comparison: You are not just sort of OK in this world, needed a little bit here and there, if you do your best- kind of thing, no, you are what this earth needs to be saved, declares Jesus! Your worth to this earth exceeds by far any star or ruler or scientist or super being this world can ever produce! Simply by being in Christ, simply by being blessed and beginning to speak and do what is appropriate to what Christ has blessed you to be- you are what this world needs.

• By being both poor in the spirit and yet shining you give witness to the glory of your Father who is in heaven. Your light points away from yourself to the real source of goodness, because you are not focusing on your self! That is so brilliantly new. People see this. If you are poor in the spirit, and yet you shine Christ's light, it must be the Father's work! And dear disciple in Christ, praising the Father for His goodwill towards us, for His immense Grace and mercy, for His new kingdom, together with others is what real joy is all about! **Amen.**

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

*Pastor Kurt Schnackenberg- Tel.: 039 315 0261*