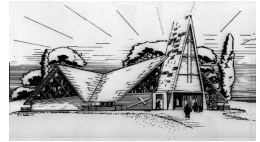




Free Evangelical Lutheran
Synod in South Africa

Sermon- Sunday Jubilate

The Good Shepherd cares for His flock in His Way!



St. John's Lutheran Parish Shelly Beach

The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Rev 7, 9-17:

- **9** After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,
 - **10** and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"
 - **11** And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God,
 - **12** saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."
 - **13** Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?"
 - **14** I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.
 - **15** "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.
 - **16** They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any-more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.
 - **17** For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."
- Let us pray: *Come Holy Spirit, open our ears, and our minds so that we will realise what Christ has done for us and be comforted so that we will give Him all honour and praise!*
Amen.

Dear Flock of the Lamb of God!

- You never know when the valley of shadow of death is going to show up, your and my time of the great tribulation. We expect it for those who are terminally ill, but not for those who are healthy.
- But wherever the valley of the shadow of death is, **there is also our Good Shepherd.** For He entered the valley of the shadow of death and came out alive on the other side. The only one who has done so. And so He is able to lead us through the valley too. Wherever it comes, whenever it comes, however it comes, you will not be alone. You have a Good Shepherd in life, but even more importantly, you have a Good Shepherd in death. For His care is not just for a

time, not just for this life, but for eternity.

• That's what we're celebrating this Easter season. Our Lord Jesus Christ is risen from the dead - the wages of sin have been paid, the grip of death and the grave have been broken, and the valley of the shadow of death has been conquered. In laying down His life for you on the cross, Jesus has provided you a way to life, that joining you in your death, you join Him in His resurrection.

• And the reading we heard from Revelation confirms this outcome, that it is not Jesus alone who comes out of the valley of death, but "*a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages . . . [all who] have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*" And in that great multitude John saw his brother apostles, who had all been taken suddenly and tragically; martyred and killed in horrible ways. In that multitude are those early Christians who had been used as food for hungry lions, burned alive for sport, or had their heads removed from their shoulders. In that great multitude are those who lived to a ripe old age and those taken too soon; the rich and the poor, the well-known and the unknown. And more recently, added to their number have been the many Christians slaughtered in hatred in Muslim lands.

• And included in that great multitude are all those who are baptised and believe and who have suffered in this valley of tears in many ways. In that great multitude you may see yourself. What John sees is the gathering of all believers before God's throne. *These are the ones*, John is told, *coming out of the great tribulation*. The ones who have come through the valley of the shadow of death, and are now at rest and peace.

• Do you see that dear congregation, you might be suffering now, you might be ridiculed because of your faith, you might be feeling isolated and alone, but that is how it is going to be. We won't be alone. We are not alone as we are united with Christ.

• There we see the beautiful fulfilled unity! And what are they singing and saying to God and His Lamb, [10] "*Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!*" Isn't that beautiful! It is the Gospel, the pure Gospel, Salvation belongs to our God and the Lamb! Salvation does not depend on the sinner. The Shepherd calls His sheep. The Shepherd lies down His life so that His sheep will live. The Shepherd is also the Lamb who gets slaughtered so that the sheep are saved. The sheep are not saving themselves. They can't. Salvation belongs to God and His Lamb. Salvation is a gift. That is the best news this cosmos has ever heard and there, see, behold, the whole of the church history, all saints saved by the

Death of the Lamb, by His blood, resonate it in the vastness of eternity! This is the new song from Heaven which the angels ignited on the night of Jesus' birth when they appeared to the shepherds in the field!

• Since that time this hymn has continued to grow in crescendo even on earth. Isn't it beautiful to see that unity of mind, true orthodoxy, the right praise, throughout heaven!

• But we have to climb down from that mountain, although we should keep that vision in the back of our minds, because that is where we are going towards. That is the vision and mission statement of the one holy Christian Church, the Body of Christ, the New Jerusalem, the Israel of God.

• However we need to come down to earth because our Shepherd has made us to be priests here on earth. He chose to shepherd His people through His servants. That is now where the reading of Acts comes in: There we see the Apostle Paul calling together the elders of the church, the pastors of Ephesus to give them a final Word before he would depart to Jerusalem because he was not expecting to get out of Jerusalem alive!

• And in this word Paul said the following [Acts 20,28]: "*Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has installed you as overseers (as bishops, as pastors), to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood.*" Here we see that our Lord shepherds His Church through His servants, through His under-shepherds. But the pastors of the church need to be supported by the congregation members, so that the Word of Jesus may reach all that need to be comforted in this valley of tears.

• And Paul admonishes all pastors of the church to pay close attention to the flock, because there are two main dangers for the flock he foresees: (1) He knows that after his departure savage wolves will come in amongst them, who will not spare the flock. So, there will be false teachers who would come in from the outside and try and wreck havoc amongst the congregation members. (2) More deadly, are *those who come from within the church, men speaking twisted things*, to draw the faithful away from the Word of truth and so away from their Good Shepherd. These are more dangerous because what they say and do may sound and look good and successful, yet be filled with the deadly poison of false doctrine, twisting the Word of God and causing devastation that cannot be seen and felt until it is too late.

• *Don't be fooled*, Paul says. Which is a good warning for us today as well. In this world the spirit of the times will always try to influence us away from God's Salvation alone! It will always try and deceive us into believing that God's Salvation

is available through a multiple of ways and not only through the Lambs' Blood! It will try and convince us that unity amongst the different religions is more important than the One Truth found in Jesus Christ alone, in His ministry for us. That is the attack from outside the church.

- On the other hand the main attack from inside the church tries to persuade us that God's Grace needs our supplement, needs another experience or feeling or human effort to seal off our salvation! God's gift of Grace through Baptism and receiving the teaching of His Word is not enough, is not sufficient. These draw the faithful away from their baptism, from the means of Grace, through which God saves us.

- So, we see, this is the reason we have to be wide awake in terms of teaching. That is why the sheep have to diligently learn the basics of God's salvation well and the pastors of God's church should and must educate God's members so that they can be prepared for the pitfalls and dangers and influences surrounding us in our days.

- I know, it would be so much more comfortable and pleasant if we didn't have to pay attention to detail, but we are still in the battling church, we are still on our way and that is why the truth is more important than unity. Deception tries to slip in unknowingly. Small shifts of accents like pushing that unity is more important than truth. Unity is important, but unity based on the truth, not unity at all cost. We also speak of missional drift, when we accept certain things for the sake of mission. And once its amongst the people, it just spreads like gangrene.

- Our Shepherd knows what we really need: We need His forgiveness, we need to be united with Him and stay united with Him. That is the unity we rejoice in.

- That's why we rejoice in Baptism - there is forgiveness of sins and unity with Christ. That's why we rejoice in Absolution - there is forgiveness of sins and unity with Christ. That's why we rejoice in the Supper - there is forgiveness of sins and unity with Christ. That's why we rejoice in the truth of the Scriptures - there is forgiveness of sins and unity with Christ. In all these ways, through all these means, the voice of our Good Shepherd calls out, and His hand reaches out, from person to person, to save.

- And so we fall in with the new Hymn of Heaven and say together with all saints and the whole company of heaven [10]: *"Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" Amen.*

- *"The Grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all." Amen. [John 22,21]*