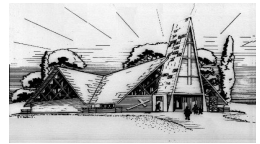




Free Evangelical Lutheran
Synod in South Africa

Sermon- Sunday Judica

The new thing God does lets us forget
our past and reach forward to what lies
ahead!



St. John's Lutheran Parish Shelly Beach

• The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Philippians 3, 4-14:

- ^{NAU} Philippians 3:1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things *again* is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.
- 2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;
- 3 for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,
- 4 although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:
- 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;
- 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.
- 7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.
- 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,
- 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith,
- 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;
- 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.
- 12 Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.
- 13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead,
- 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.
- Let us pray: *Come Holy Spirit, open our ears, inspire in us the love for Your truth and let us be found in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

• **Dear Beloved in Christ!**

- Today we need to talk about dealing with our past! How does one deal with one's past? Now, if there ever was a person who experienced a radical conversion- a full 180 degree turn of direction- it was the Apostle Paul. He summarises his previous life himself, he does not try to hide it: He summarises his previous life with one term, "***having confidence in the flesh***".
- What does Paul mean with this? He states what reasons he had for confidence in

the flesh, namely, he was circumcised on the eighth day, he was one of the people of Israel, he was of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, according to the Law, a Pharisee. He had great zeal, as he was a persecutor of the church. According to the righteousness in the Law, he became blameless. He was one of the top Israelites fighting against the Christians of his time.

- Paul had great confidence in his heritage, his family line and his commitment to the Law of God!
- In our days there also exists a common type of having confidence in the flesh, when it comes to the thought of judgement day. Many people have come to reason like this: 'I know I am not perfect, but you know God is such a loving God, and I am not all that bad. I am socially involved in this project or help my sister or my brother paying off their house etc. Overall I had a good life! I think God will let me go through. I will sort it out with Him when I get there. I cannot see Him sending me to hell! I just have a feeling I am safe!' Some might even add, 'at least I am not like those hypocrites who always go to church!'
- Having confidence in our flesh really is the hardest thing to root out! That has become the default way of seeing ones self before God!
- ***“Having confidence in our flesh”*** is not something that applies only to the Jewish religion. There are literally thousands of ways this applies to. It applies to the past of all people. Since the Fall, we have all been born with this idea in our heads! Teaching the Grace of God to people is the hardest thing to do. It really is a new thing God is doing, as Isaiah calls it. On the other hand, everybody knows how the Law works. What you sow is what you will reap. What you put in is what you will get out. If you please God by keeping His commandments and going to church He will be pleased with you. If you are obedient and not naughty, He will love you.
- If you preach that, people go, 'right on, I understand that. I am in. Tell me what to do and I will do it!' All of this falls under ***“having confidence in the flesh”***. Paul warns against this state as ***“evil workers”***, ***“dogs”***, ***“false circumcision”***! That was his past. That is also our past! That is what Scripture calls ***“old Adam”***! We need to see this very clearly today, the old Adam is never a-religious! Strictly speaking, there is no such a thing as an atheist, because an atheist trusts in his or her self to know the truth! He or she is his or her own god. I don't think it is a good option. All old Adams belong to one of the many, many false religions. All of them have this one thing in common: They teach in one way or the other, subtle or explicitly ***“having confidence in the flesh”***.
- As long as you do your very best to keep God's commandments it should be

sufficient to pass the test on the Last Day. So, if you have never been in jail or have done something really bad, you know, you should be OK. This is the widespread ***“having confidence in the flesh”*** heresy. Paul warns us against this religion of our old Adam! See, look, beware of those who teach you to follow that ancient heresy!

• He describes the new thing, the new way of redemption that God has done with us as follows: ***We are the real circumcision ...!*** In other words, we are Gods people, we are His children. That is a fact, not a wish! A new being, who we are! In Col 2,11-12 Paul speaks about the circumcision made without hands: ***“and in Him (Christ) you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.***

• We are the real circumcision since God’s work in Baptism! He circumcised us so that we worship in the Spirit of God and we boast to be in Christ Jesus our Lord! That is where our confidence lies: We boast to be in Christ Jesus. We are the real circumcision. We are baptised into Christ! Therefore we put no confidence in the flesh!

• We don’t need that any more! Our old Adam is crucified and buried, dead, past tense. We don’t need our heritage, our family line, to have confidence before God! I neither boast on ***“my decision for Christ”***! We boast who we are in Christ by the working of the Holy Spirit in the circumcision made without hands, namely Baptism!

• This is the new thing God has done with us, which He wants to do with all nations! This is the Gospel which puts us in a new space, namely in the Body of Christ!

• So, how does Paul, who is baptised into Christ deal with his past? We have to remember, this was a huge issue for him, because the same man who not so long ago persecuted the Christians all of a sudden preached to them the Gospel. So, will his past not make it impossible for him to do his ministry?

• He says [7-9], ***“whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ”***. And stronger, ***“More than that, I consider all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, through whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,...”***

• So how does he consider his past as Hebrew of Hebrews, his former zeal to

persecute the Christians? As rubbish, as garbage! There is only one thing important to him: That he may gain Christ and be found in Him. That determines His life! The past is still there yes, the old Adam still fights against us, daily, but it counts nothing in his new life! It does not determine him anymore! The past does not rob him of his confidence before God! The past does not haunt him anymore. He is driven, completely, by the Grace given to him!

- This new thing God has done in his life God has also done in your life! And everytime we meet here and hear His Gospel He is doing it to us again. He restores our confidence to work in God's vinyard! Yes, Paul's past was terrible, but that has been forgiven! God does not count it against him anymore. God does not count your sins of the past week against you anymore, since He has spoken His Word of reconciliation. Your sins are forgiven!

- You might still be ashamed of what you did wrong, of falling into having confidence in the flesh, but that is history! Whenever you hear the Gospel, God is doing His new thing with you, as you hear Him! Christ makes you His own. So we have a Christ-esteem instead of a self-esteem! We have something to boast about, namely '*Christ laid bold of me*'. He said, you are mine! And this dear people gives us all the confidence we need to work in His kingdom, to spread His kingdom in our communities through our vocations! Forget about the distrurbing issues you may have about anything in your past. Today is a new day, made by the Lord for you, the *Lord's Day*. Redemption belongs to Him. And He has redeemed you of your "*confidence in the flesh religion*". What a relief! What a burden taken from us! Therefore, live in this new confidence you have received from the Lord! Think this way, rejoice in this new thing God has done for you, today! Press on to make it your own! **Amen.**

- *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Amen. (Eph 1,3.)"*