



Free Evangelical
Lutheran Synod
in South Africa

Sermon for All Saint's Day 2017

Whom Jesus blesses!



St. John's Lutheran Parish
Shelly Beach

• The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Mt 5, 1-12:

- ^{ESV} 1 Seeing the crowds, He (*Jesus*) went up on the mountain, and when He sat down, His disciples came to Him.
- 2 And He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:
- 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- 4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
- 5 "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
- 6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
- 7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
- 8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
- 9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
- 10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- 11 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.
- 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
- Let us pray: *Come Holy Spirit, open our ears and our hearts, let us realise that we belong to Your Body of Saints, the Body of the poor in Spirit, to the vast number of people who revealed in Your Revelation. Amen.*

• **Dear Congregation of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit!**

- Who is worthy to open his mouth and speak these words we have just heard? These are Words straight from the heart of God the Father. It is Christ's teaching, His sermon on the mount. Only because He commanded His church to preach His word dare we, with due reverence and diligence, take His word in our mouths.
- They are first of all addressed to His disciples, to those whom He has called to follow Him and hear Him. They are addressed to you! Jesus speaks these words. He says to us today: ***"Blessed are the poor in the spirit..."***. This little sentence overthrows everything that mankind assumes to know with regard to religion or spirituality. *Makarioi* is translated as "blessed". In Afrikaans: "geluksalig", Deutsch: "selig". It expresses the joy of paradise, the happiness and elatedness of participating in Salvation,

in heaven itself.

• Before we carry on, let us first take a look at heaven. We can do that. Revelation 7 tells us what is going on there [Rev 7,9-10]: *“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, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”*

• A multitude with palmbranches in their hands. This is a victorious gathering of all the faithful believers in Christ of all times- a snapshot preview of what will come. That means, there you are! You are part of that multitude. Here on earth we sing “Have no fear little flock”, but accumulated throughout the ages, we see it will be a vast multitude.

• And we hear some very comforting words [16-17]: *“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. 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.”*

• Dear congregation that is God’s vision for our future! We are on that Way. That is where God’s Mission is taking us. And we also know that when we gather as little flock, here on earth, in the Name of the Trinity, that we participate in the Divine Service of the Body of Christ as a whole. That is, although we are still part of the suffering church, in the Divine Service we are united with the triumphant church! In the Body of Christ Heaven and earth are united! Its real, but we can only see it with our eyes of faith, enlightened by the Word of God.

• And now, someone could say, ok pastor, this sounds all very good and so on, but I don’t see saints in the church? These two don’t seem to match, the real people in the church today, and even history doesn’t paint a rosy picture either of the church. Where are all your saints, who would be worthy to enter heaven? This seems to be wishful thinking.

• This takes us back to the heading of Jesus’ sermon on the mount, ***“Blessed are the poor in the Spirit, for theirs IS the kingdom of Heaven.”*** To them belong the kingdom of Heaven. Its a present tense reality! Jesus says it. Its a reality which Jesus

speaks onto His disciples. Ours is the kingdom of Heaven! We may say this. Jesus says it.

- And it is not a fairytale at all. It has got nothing to do with myths and madeup things or wishful thinking. Its the most soberminded word we have on earth. Hear the huge paradox: Not those are blessed who are rich in the spirit!!

- Christ does not bless those who claim to be spiritually rich! That would indeed turn everything into a fairytale, into myth. Many people believe or hope to earn "saintly" status for helping others or in our days by preserving nature. They try to climb the ladder into sainthood by themselves. They look very saintly to the world. The world covers them with medals and accolades.

- But here comes Jesus and blesses those who lack of the spirit! There is a poverty of the spirit. They are not rich, they are in need of the spirit, constantly! Blessed are they, says Jesus! This is the remarkable heading of Jesus' sermon on the mount.

- And therefore, yes, if the world looks at the suffering church, the struggling church, its true, the people who are blessed don't look blessed in the eyes of the world. The world measures blessedness with successfulness.

- Blessed are the successful, the world would say. Not that success is not a good thing. But Jesus blesses exactly those who are not successful, in whose lives many things go wrong, those, who are like beggars before God, who have nothing to offer, those are the blessed.

- Jesus gives a reason for this: *"Blessed are the poor in the spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* The poor in the spirit, whom Jesus blesses, they belong to the kingdom of heaven. Please note: This is not a prescriptive statement as in: If you manage to be poor in the spirit then the kingdom will be yours- not so. Rather it means that among those who make no claim of righteousness or being spiritual, God's plan of salvation through Jesus is already effective.

- Jesus describes His disciples as they are in the struggling church, the persecuted church on earth. But at the same time the kingdom of God is theirs! What they feel and experience is persecution, poverty in spirit, mourning, hunger and thirst for righteousness while they are in the suffering and battling church in this world.

- That is what we experience. That is what we feel. We experience the Cross of Christ. We experience suffering with our natural senses. The church does not look powerful, does not seem to have any benefits, a bunch of poor in the spirit! Other religions and spirituality movements make much bigger claims, they are more than a church, prosperity now, holistic healing now, making attempts and claims of achieving world peace. The church Jesus describes does not claim any of that. It claims nothing

glamorous for itself. That is the visible struggling side of the church.

- But this is not the only side. The other side is hidden, revealed only by the word of Christ, seen only by the eyes of faith. That is the triumphant church, the kingdom of heaven, the Body of fulfilment, where those who mourn will be comforted to the full. Where those who are now being persecuted or mourn and shed a lot of tears will be comforted. All tears will be wiped away.

- These two sides of the church belong to one church! These are two sides of the same Body. There is only one kingdom of heaven which exists now already. Those who are struggling and suffering are now already united with the perfect yet incomprehensible, not possible to experience side of the Body.

- Now most important: This unity is a reality because of the one who speaks: Christ Jesus. He has fulfilled this reality on the cross for you. Heaven and earth are united in His Body for you! It has to be Jesus speaking these words, otherwise they turn into requirements. Jesus has to be present here today, in person. He has to speak these words through His servants, then they are the best proclamation, then we are blessed by them.

- In the last two verses of our passage Jesus speaks very direct: "**Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account.**" This is another far stretch Jesus teaches here. When you are not popular, when you are persecuted, Jesus blesses you. And He goes up one notch:

- Jesus says: 'Rejoice and be glad if others persecute you. Your reward is great in heaven. This will put you on the same level of joy as the prophets who were persecuted before you. It is not the time to remain silent and sit in our cosy corner all for ourselves. We have received these wonderful words of Christ. Let us invite those outside to the struggling church, to the communion of the poor in spirit, to those who gather each Sunday because they hunger and thirst for righteousness, because they need to hear the voice of Jesus to bless them and Jesus will show them the kingdom of heaven. He will reveal Himself to them that He is the kingdom of Heaven. Here is forgiveness, life and Salvation, in abundance. **Amen.**

- *Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.*

Amen. (ESV Eph 3,20-21)