



Free Evangelical  
Lutheran Synod  
in South Africa

## Sermon for 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Thanksgiving 2017

*The Significance of the Death &  
Resurrection of Jesus in the story of all of  
mankind!*



St. John's Lutheran Parish  
Shelly Beach

### • **The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Revelations 21, 1-8:**

- <sup>1</sup>Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.
- <sup>2</sup>And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
- <sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.
- <sup>4</sup>He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any-more, for the former things have passed away."
- <sup>5</sup>And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."
- <sup>6</sup>And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.
- <sup>7</sup>The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.
- <sup>8</sup>But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death."
- *Let us pray: Come Holy Spirit, open our ears and our hearts so that we will see what You see and drink from the spring of water which gives Life. Amen.*

### • **Dear Beloved of God!**

- This congregation is much older than 50 years. Its beginning goes back to the year 1883, when Pastor Stoppel accepted a call from a growing number of settlers to serve them with Word and Sacrament. Nevertheless, it is appropriate that we give thanks for the fifty years this congregation was settled here in Shelly Beach, after its beginning at Umhlangeni.
- The beginnings were small and the commitment was huge. Yet, not always everything went smooth. The graveyard tells its own story in this regard. There were joyful times and difficult times. Being involved in building a congregation and church buildings is exciting, but it is also stressful. So, the buildings tell their own story of

what happened here. For example, stress, but also beautiful success.

• Then we have the different people of the congregation, the different types, those of the past and present, those who left and those who stayed and those coming back. All of them have their own story to tell, from their own perspective. Then, we have the people of the other congregations, Umhlangeni, our mother-congregation, so to speak, Bethanien, Norwegian Settlers, etc, they have their story to tell. And we have the communities surrounding us, and they have their stories to tell. And we have the FELSISA, our synod, and its congregations, especially the ones in KZN, they have their story to tell with regard to this congregation.

• So, we have a multiple amount of stories to be told about the last fifty years of this congregation. Each congregation member can tell a different story. A multiple conglomeration of stories, some conflicting with others, some remembering major things, some minute little details, all coming up in our minds if we say 50 years St. John's Lutheran Parish in Shelly Beach.

• That's why history books tend to get so fat, because whose version of the story do you now leave out? Yet, even if we could summarise all of these stories together we would still be without the most important part of the existence of St. John's Lutheran Parish.

• I am referring to the story God has to tell. We find His story recorded in the Holy Scriptures, God's story with mankind. Let's be more specific, what do we mean by God's story: We are talking about Jesus Christ and Him crucified, resurrected and ascended, for you and for all people! We are talking about the Word of the Cross, which, viewed from a historical point of view happened a long time ago! For the last 50 years, by the Grace of God, this Gospel has been preached in this congregation and we still continue to hear it Sunday for Sunday!

• Why is this written Word of the Cross so central, that we never get beyond it, that we never leave it behind? We ask this on purpose in a time where many are veering off into everyday prophecies on the one hand and on the other hand where yet others view the Bible as historical information only. These are real temptations for all Christians.

• As if the Holy Scriptures are not speaking into our present situation! As if the ancient Law and Gospel have to be applied to my life. As if God's written Word needs to be made relevant to my life, as if we could do so. We need to realise what we say when we use those phrases. Also: 'lets see, what I can get out of the Word for my life.' Here is my life, my story, my narrative, lets see how the word can contribute to it, how it can be helpful to make my life a success! So, the basis is my life or the history of the world and now hopefully the Gospel, coming from the outside of the world, will impact it a little or hopefully a lot.

• If we are on this path, and its the temptation of the hour, what happens is, the Word of the Cross-happened 2000 years ago, is kept in the past. At best, it has only got relevance until and for the moment of conversion and then we move on towards trying to find God in our everyday lives, in the happenings of the world etc. So, I am not in the Scriptures, reading and studying God's Word, but my head is in the newspapers, on the internet, Facebook etc. to see what God is doing now. I am studying the world to see what God is doing. The temptation is to take what I am seeing, there in the books of the world, and then go and impose what I see onto the Scriptures, if I even bother to do that.

• If I am doing this, it means, the Holy Scriptures are not sufficient for me. It is then that we get bored hearing the Gospel. It is then that we need new prophecies every day, which are not written in the Scriptures. And it is then that all becomes very speculative and driven by emotions. And we fix our eyes on everything but Christ!

• Very significantly, God refers to His *written Word* as being "revelation"! "*The revelation of Jesus Christ, ...*" that is the heading of the Book of Revelations. We heard today how John was told to write down the words which are trustworthy and true. Quite at the end of the Book of Revelations we find the written Word of God still being significant. The written Word of God never loses its significance! It is revelation. That means it is clear. It is open, not closed. It is certain, not speculation. Its absolute, not relative. God pulls away the curtains and reveals what He is doing in His Church through Jesus.

• God is Alpha and Omega. He is beginning and end. In chapter 22, 6ff Jesus says the same about Himself. He also is Alpha and Omega, beginning and end. Do you realise, what God is saying here?

• It is not possible to tell someone's story, anyone's story, your own story, without mentioning God. God is always involved in your story! Always. Anyone who tries to tell the story of his or her life or the story of a congregation and leaves out God, has not only missed a certain part of it, the foundation is missing. Its not based on the truth at all! Its a complete lie!

• And let's be more precise now, anyone who leaves out of His story the cross and resurrection of Christ, leaves out the reason for being alive! There is no story that can be told, in truth, of anyone of any time, without having at its center the Cross and Resurrection of Christ! It's the reason there is still life on earth after the Fall! It's the reason that God still pursues His mission towards His promise that He will dwell with His people.

• Those who are thirsty, those who know that they are the poor in the Spirit, those who know that by and of themselves they are sinners, can receive the forgiveness of sins in abundance, more than seventy times seven times and Live with Him!

• Those, on the other hand, who reject the water of Life, the forgiveness of sins, the gift of God, paid for by the Death of Christ, and instead embrace their sinful life will remain forever united with sin. That will be their story! They don't have the power to make their own story. They deceive themselves if they think they can simply ignore God!

• In other words, it is not a question of whether God's word has any relevance in my life, it's a question of whether I see and realise how lost I am, without receiving His water of Life! The basis of my existence depends on God alone! That's true even for those who deny God. While denying God they live of Him! On the Last Day every eye will see that it is true.

• But, God is first and foremost a Father who loves His creation. That is why God reveals how He works, what His plan is, what His mission is, and even how He manages to advance His mission towards the beautiful final reality as spelled out in the last chapters of the Book of Revelations.

• His mission is summarised in the Gospel-reading for today, namely *to seek and save the lost*. That includes every soul! God is building His church, the living organism, consisting of people, who drink of His forgiveness and live. He is building-up the Body of Christ! And, He is doing so in the world, in the history of all people, not beyond us, but with us, through us and in us!

• In the midst of defeat, the fear of death, the doubts and trials that seem to contradict the mercy and justice of God- it is nevertheless the death and resurrection of Christ that promises hope and gives meaning and purpose to one's own story.

• It's not that we don't have personal separate stories. It's not that God is suppressing diversity. What God is doing is, He reveals to us our whole story, also the part we don't see. He reveals to us on what path we truly are, how our story is going to end, depending on whether we drink of the water of Life or whether we will be found without it on the Last Day of this passing earth and heaven. Therefore, He calls people to gather around His water of Life, like the members of this congregation, and sends them out to call others to the present tense reality of God's promise in Christ, proclaiming the life-giving word: Your sins are forgiven!

• It is true, God is making all things new! He gives you a new story, a new beginning, again and again, here in His Body, with the result of pure Life with Him, forever.

• **Lord thank** You for Your story and for including us and those before us, especially in the past 50 years, in Your Mega story of salvation. **Amen.**

• *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. (2 Cor 13, 14).*