



Free Evangelical Lutheran
Synod in South Africa

Sermon for the Tenth Sunday of Pentecost 2017

The church of Mount Zion!



St. John's Lutheran Parish
Shelly Beach

- The passage from Holy Scripture for today will be read further on in the sermon.
- Let us pray: *“Lord, shine the light of your Word into our hearts and minds. Amen.”*
- **Dear Brothers and Sisters in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,**
- We want peace on earth! We want an end to conflict. Thanks be to God that we have a gathering today, marked by an atmosphere of fellowship and peace. While our country has a history, where peace so often seems to be only a dream, the fact that we have a peaceful service today is truly a blessing. We have come here from our respective homes, we come from different backgrounds and different situations in life, as together we hear God's Word and gladly sing to his glory.
- It is difficult, though, for people to understand why we sing with joy, when one considers our history and context – crime, government, the economy, just to highlight major difficulties in our country. The differences between us, such as customs and practices, can divide us. We can nag and frustrate each other to such an extent that it is hard to see peace and fellowship between us as even an option. There can be neglect of one another, and we harm others in pursuit of our own goals. We strive for the good of our own little crowd, pushing aside those we disagree with.
- We celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation this year. The heart of the Reformation and what we celebrate is the rediscovery of the true Gospel. God saved us by his grace alone, by faith alone, alone through Christ. The church, leading up to that event, was scarred and torn by an insistence by church leaders that their way was God's way. Even when they were shown by means Scripture the need to repent and bring God's people back onto the right path, those in powerful positions refused to listen. They demanded a

complete retraction of their teachings by the Lutheran Reformers. Those leaders of the institutional church of the time insisted that there would only be peace on their terms.

• Our celebration of the Reformation focuses on God's blessing on his Church, that he restored the true and clear teaching of his Word. He restored the proclamation of the Gospel: We are saved by grace alone, by faith alone, by our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, alone!

• Yet, people continue to pursue their own ways in life. The Church still faces this danger. God's ways continue to be threatened by human goals and pursuits. As we sit here, gathered for this service, we know of problems that threaten our Christian fellowship.

• The rifts and divides between people are like a fast spreading disease. Although there is a healthy body – a fellowship of Christians –, it can quickly be sickened by the infections of frustration, anger, hurt and the pointing of fingers. A fast lane to damaging feuds can develop. At other times, rifts have been there for a long time, and we just carry on with our ways, not mending the broken relationships.

• But this hurts us so deeply, because even though we are new people in Christ, we often do not act or live as such. We bring the disease of sin back into the body, which Christ has healed – namely his Church. Instead of living as witnesses of Christ, we pursue our own goals. In the face of threats to us in life, we seek peace, but we want to shape it ourselves – on our terms and according to our ideas. We shape our own ways and paths, while at the same time calling ourselves “Christians”.

• God's Word for this sermon addresses this very issue. It is a passage of promise from a prophet, which speaks to a nation with its own wills and ways. The sermon passage is taken from the Book of Isaiah, chapter 2, the first five verses:

•¹ The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

² It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of

the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, ³ and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. ⁴ He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. ⁵ O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

- The people of Israel, descendants of Jacob, were going their own ways. They were living their lives according to their own plans. Still, they were troubled, because their tiny nation was surrounded and confronted by powerful enemies.
- Isaiah brings the people of Jacob words with a remarkable promise. Their house of worship will be the one, to which all people will flow! Their enemies will abandon their wars and pursuits to conquer them.
- The prophet does not only call his people to God’s will and way. He brings them the prophecy, that all nations and people will seek and follow God’s instruction and his way. They have a sure promise that their God will unite the whole world, and rid them of division and pain.
- The call sounds out to us, who seek peace today: Christ is the light of the world, which is shining out to the entire world! In him God kept his promises in this passage: Christ sent his Gospel out to people from all nations! The peace we seek is found in him and his message. The Good News of his rescue mission – by his death on the cross and his resurrection – is the instruction, which goes out from God and his house – or out of Zion and Jerusalem, as the text states. Jesus Christ has established his Church as the new mountain

of Zion, which will be his New Jerusalem for all eternity!

• When we face the issues of our time and our world, these promises are not a mere dream of sunshine and roses. It is rather a promise of real change, which will happen! It has already begun. It began when Christ was born, and walked his path to the cross, redeeming us through his death and resurrection. This is why the prophet shouts out to us – “O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!” These words pull us Christians, who are the new house of Jacob, into the path of light, which is Christ Jesus! For all nations will come under God’s rule, seeking his instruction and protection!

• Our yearning for true peace is stilled and answered by Jesus Christ. Through him we have the peace, which surpasses all understanding. He brings his peace into our broken world. He is the one who builds bridges over the rifts between us. He ties us, his brothers and sister, together again. His instruction reshapes our lives, putting us on his path.

• The Good News of Christ’s rescue of humanity from death is the message we spread to all corners of the earth. It is what we sing about today. For through the Holy Spirit we are, as we heard Jesus say in the Gospel reading, “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world”. He keeps us salty for his seasoning of the earth, so that its people will be to his taste. He puts his rechargeable batteries in us – batteries that are recharged as we hear his word, and receive his Sacrament, so that we keep shining his light into the world!

• Through the Holy Spirit, we as Christ’s Church have been brought to the mountain where we received salvation. Through him we have become one people, kept in the peace, which was won on the cross by our Saviour. We sing for joy, because God takes us by the hand and guides us on his path. “O Children of God, come, let us walk in the light of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Amen.

• *May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. (Sermon written by Marlon Hiestermann)*