



Free Evangelical
Lutheran Synod
in South Africa

Sermon for the Day of Confession & Prayer 2017

*By your words you will be justified and by
your words you will be condemned!*



St. John's Lutheran Parish
Shelly Beach

• The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Mt 12, 31-37:

- ^{ESV} ³¹ Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.
- ³² And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.
- ³³ "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit.
- ³⁴ You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.
- ³⁵ The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.
- ³⁶ I tell you, on the day of judgement people will give account for every careless word they speak,
- ³⁷ for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

• *Let us pray: Come Holy Spirit, open our ears and hearts so that we will be convicted of our sins, and seek forgiveness and become confessional Christians in the world. Amen.*

• **Dear Congregation of the Holy Trinity!**

• [37] *"By your words you will be justified. By your words you will be condemned".* How many words do we not speak in a day, in a month, in a year, in our life-time? And on top of everything, this Word of Jesus hits home really hard, if we consider the context of these words, namely, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The sin which will not be forgiven, if one blasphemes the Holy Spirit! If one speaks out against the Holy Spirit who wants to give you the forgiveness of Christ, you will not receive forgiveness. And without forgiveness, there is no life and no salvation!

• Words are important, especially those with regard to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. So, one could argue, in that case I will rather not say anything or keep it as open as possible. It would seemingly be safer. If I only say I believe in the Bible, in Jesus, in God, in other words, keep it as vague as possible so that I cannot be nailed down. Don't become too specific. Then you are in for trouble, it seems. This is the dominant trend in Christianity today. To be confessional is out. To be spiritual and experience the

divine, everyone for himself and herself, that is considered to be unity in diversity.

- That is why people gather around family in the family churches, around charismatic persons, around signs and wonders where experience is everything, around social projects in other churches, around tradition in still others! But, to gather around a specific confession of Christ, to actually be specific about what one believes, teaches and confesses concerning Christ, is considered to be outdated and long gone by most, also amongst the Lutheran Christians. And here let us ask ourselves tonight, where do I stand with this? It is easier said than done!
- Confessions of faith just divide not unite, goes the saying. So, 'let us all float along with one another and leave doctrine for God to sort it all out! I will use my reading and understanding abilities for my work only. There I am able to study for years and years, but when I come to church I simply switch off my mind and just float along in my emotion!'
- However, this won't work out in the end, because Jesus it is, who wants a confession from us. God blocks this way of deliberately remaining unspecific about Christ comprehensively!! He asks us, who do you say that I am? That is asking us what do we confess to know of His innermost BEING and His ministry! This is getting very personal and extremely specific!! Therefore, we seem to be in a real catch 22 situation. We need to speak, but when we speak out we risk being judged. And God even wants us to speak out in front of others [Mt 10, 32-33]: *"So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven."*
- God wants confessional Christians confessing what they believe, to the world. He doesn't want us to remain silent or keep it private! Not at all!
- That is why Jesus gave us His Word and opened the Scriptures to His disciples and opens them up for us too, so that we can come to know Him, His person, His being, and His ministry for us. Its not that we have to come up with an answer or confession all by ourselves. Jesus says [Mt 10,27]: *"What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops."* Jesus has given everything we need to know to His disciples. We have it in the Bible!
- Jesus gave them His teaching and then He asked the disciples, who do you (plural) say that I am. And in that same context Jesus also referred to what others were saying. Others are saying this, what are you saying? So, yes, our confession must be specific, so that it properly divides from all wrong teachings about who He is!! The whole point

of confession is to be specific, as specific as possible to divide truth from error. To put a boundary around truth. To fence off the truth from error, so that the truth is clear and certain! That is the whole point of the holy Scriptures, of Jesus Himself. He says in this same context [Mt 10,34], that He didn't come to unite, but to divide!

• So, we have to see something important here! The Scriptures teach us who Jesus is and what His ministry is for us. After we have been taught by Him through the church, we have to answer Him. Furthermore, Jesus wants us to be prepared to always give account of the hope that is in us before others. We have to confess our confession before others, also to other groups of Christians. And so, we see how important it is to study God's Word and to even know what others are saying concerning Christ! Jesus wants us to know the differences between truth and error!! He insists on it for our own up-building and certainty and for the benefit of others. This suggests most strongly that we can know who He is by hearing Him speak to us, through the Scriptures!

• But, now, will this not cause discussion, even fighting over the Scriptures, you might protest?

• Not necessarily, but yes in most cases, this is an uncomfortable but true assessment. Its not going to be all cosy and peaceful while we still have grave differences of understanding of who Jesus is amongst Christians! That is unfortunately the truth. We cannot pretend to be united when there are grave differences.

• At least one question comes up: Why is it so important to be so specific about Jesus, that it risks the unity of the church? Unity of the Church is often played out against being confessional. The less specific one is, the more open Christianity becomes. One can also say, the more unspecific our confession is the more it coincides with what the world thinks and believes. The danger is that it might slide down the path of inclusiveness until there is virtually no difference between Christianity, other religions and common sense of the world any more.

• What is the problem with this, though? The problem is that Christ is driven from the centre, the One who is holding all things together, and accomplishing all things regarding Salvation. He is replaced with what the *Christian* should do and accomplish to make a better world. A vital shifts happens, from receiving forgiveness of sins from God through His church, towards ethical and social projects to repair the broken world through human wisdom and power. On the other hand, an unspecific confession of a church which floats along on *experience of the divine* inevitably ends in enthusiasm, in "Schwärmerei", as Luther called it. That is, it also ends in humanism where the church

dissolves in just another way of the world! It ends in works-rigtheousness and in socialism where Christ is merely an example and a helper in physical need, but not the one who justifies, sanctifies and saves us from God's wrath, present tense!!

• But, isn't confessing specifically creating sects? This is a huge accusation used to let people flee from any confession of faith. What is a sect? A sect is a group of people who claim to be special *Christians*, who claim to be especially pious in what *they* do! *They* often claim to be especially close to God.

• A sect is a group that again, like with humanism, places all emphasis on *their own very pious behaviour* as opposed to what Christ is doing for us! The right confession confesses that we as Christians are sinful to the core and only by being united with Christ are we justified, sanctified and saved.

• So, we may realise that sectarianism and humanism in the church are the two sides of the same coin, namely "Schwärmerei", enthusiasm about the self.

• The true confession of Christ, the specific one, which states that Christ is the only Saviour, who saves sinners, who saves the unrighteous, who saves those who have become like little children, depending completely on God for their salvation from the revealed wrath of God keeps us humble and on the ground!

• It places our hope on the rock of salvation and it makes us merciful towards the worst sinner, towards the worst heretic and enthusiast, without deviating from the true confession. The true confession is the best news for all people including humanists and enthusiasts, because in the end, salvation does in fact not rest in us. We cannot create the new Utopia, a rainbow nation, or a new world- only Christ is doing it for us, for all of us.

• Therefore, you and I, and all others, we should not refrain from being very specific who Christ is and what He has done, what He does and will accomplish for all children of God! Withholding the truth while knowing it, from other poor sinners, like myself, is very unloving and selfish! Therefore, Jesus encourages us today, tell others about the vital truth you know, in Love, not to destroy but to gain them for Christ's kingdom, where freedom from evil and freedom from the self is a divine reality. **Amen.**