



Free Evangelical
Lutheran Synod
in South Africa

Sermon- Sunday Estomihi (RH4) 2018

Justice and Righteousness must flow!



St. John's Lutheran Parish
Shelly Beach

• The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Amos 5, 21-24:

- ^{ESV 21} "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
- ²² Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them.
- ²³ Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen.
- ²⁴ But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.
- ²⁵ "Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?
- ²⁶ You shall take up Sikkuth your king, and Kiyun your star-god- your images that you made for yourselves,
- ²⁷ and I will send you into exile beyond Damascus," says the LORD, whose name is the God of hosts.

• ***Let us pray:*** *Come Holy Spirit, open our ears, let Your Word be a light in our hearts and let Your righteousness flow in Your Service into our hearts via the forms you have ordained. Amen.*

• **Dear Beloved of the Lord!**

• Prayers rejected, songs and worship turned down. You have hidden yourself in a cloud so that no prayer comes through- voice of a lamenting prophet of those times. Amos had to prophecy this staunch message to Israel. He came from Judah. He was a foreigner in the northern parts. With harsh words God shut the doors. He rejected the people of Israel. His wrath was on His way. "I will not listen" said God.

"Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream". Bitter irony lay in these words.

• But why? People were literally streaming to Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba and worshipped God. So they assumed.

• If one would have interviewed a priest in those days asking him what sensible worship consists of, what one needed to do to please God he probably would have

answered: Seek Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba. Why these? Beersheba was sanctified since Isaac. Bethel got installed by Jeroboam I to gather the people so that they need not go to Jerusalem, because of the hostility between Israel in the north and Judea in the south. This was the spot where Jacob dreamt about the ladder coming down from heaven to earth. Shouldn't this be a perfect spot to find God? Isn't that taking the temple to the people? Gilgal became famous because of Samuel. This was one of the places where he sat court.

- Three places which were deeply rooted in Israel's tradition as sacred places. Therefore, seek Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba said the priests.
- Against these Amos proclaimed: Seek NOT Bethel, NOT Gilgal and NOT Beersheba, but seek God! But, didn't they mean God, weren't they praying and worshipping to God there at these places? What they would have confirmed God rejected. No. Not so.
- They rejected the will of God by not honouring the temple God had built in Jerusalem by king Solomon. That was the only place where God was to be found! You couldn't decide, for whatever reason, be it practical reasons, be it creative reasons, that you suddenly declared that say for instance Bethel is from now on the place of God's worship.
- If you did that in OT times, you were not worshipping God. Then all sacrifices meant nothing. All praise and worship, no matter how beautiful and how many attended, it's all idol worship!
- And on top of this came the sins against the second table of God's Law, sins against the neighbour, namely neglecting to feed the poor, the gangsters were running free whilst obedient citizens were oppressed. The wise prophets who proclaimed the truth of God were silenced whilst the false prophets drew large crowds and were loved by the high society.
- The people were hating whatever was good and right, yet they loved everything crooked, corrupt and evil.
- Truly astonishing isn't it? If one hears this, many bells in our heads are ringing. This sounds so ... hmm modern, even post-modern, or is it generation x,y,z- where are we anyhow? It sounds just like today.
- And to even better see where we all fit in here, we have to hear what God said to

them concerning the forty years in the wilderness. In the wilderness the trouble wasn't the place of worship. God said, you made sacrifices all those years, but what about your star god and other images you made for yourselves. You never worshipped me alone, with your whole heart! So, all those sacrifices and songs and psalm singing, they don't count anything. I will not accept them!

- In that case at least the place and the form were right, but the content was missing. Their hearts were not going along with the Liturgy! They were not thirsty for *God's* righteousness. They were in service yet serving their own idols with their minds and their hearts far far away removed from God and His Word!
- Their minds were tied to other gods and their desires were drifting off to other things!
- And I think, you might realise, this is getting pretty close to home!
- We have to realise where the actual problems or dangers exist as we draw conclusions for us in NT times! The first problem comes in with the wrong place. In the NT this means, if one goes to a group of people who are not gathered around the Word and Sacraments of the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that only in the living Body of Christ will we find the Holy Trinity, who will share the righteousness of Christ with us.
- That is the requirement of God: Justice must roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream! In other words, the gifts of Christ **MUST** be handed out. You cannot just talk about sin and how to avoid it by trying to motivate people to try their best and come up with many genius tricks and tips of how to do it. That is not good enough. You, see, God wants justice to flow, real justice. Genuine righteousness, that what is right in God's eyes must be fulfilled. Yes fully sanctified hearts must result from His Service!
- If that does not happen, its fake, its useless, its works-righteousness, its old traditional human spirituality clad in modern forms. Its nothing more than motivational speaking, the same stuff the Pharisees did. What God wants is the type of sermon Jesus gave. He spoke with authority. He didn't only speak about the kingdom. He spoke it into existence: Repent, for the kingdom of God is near! Stand up, your sins are forgiven! See, your faith has helped you! It is only there that you will find the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit is only to be found where the Word

of God is proclaimed, that is, where it is creating something new, is giving the righteousness of Christ through the ordained means of the Word: Proclamation of Law and Gospel, Baptism and Holy Communion. You have to go to the right place!

• Then we also saw that it was possible to go to the right place, but the Word handed out to us in all its different forms might not reach our hearts and minds and desires, because they are tuned onto other idols. We might be busy with our home-made idols or worries, not listening or receiving the real gifts God is giving into our hearts. And if we then sing praises to God for all His wonderful gifts He has given to us, its plain hypocrisy- we haven't even received them with thankfulness, we were not thirsty for them!

• Dear congregation, do you see, how blind we are? How little we really understand and grasp of what is going on in God's Way of serving us? That is why we can always, every year, hear the story of Jesus opening the eyes of the blind man. We need that repetition! Our eyes need to be opened Sunday for Sunday, because we forget, that we are weak, our idols in our minds consume us, time and time again.

• That is why the Lord leads us to repentance every Sunday, strictly speaking every day, as we hear His Word spoken to us via the devotions in our homes. We confess our sins and something formidable happens, God buries our sins in Jesus' death. And the result is, we receive a clean consciousness, the logbook of sins is crossed out. And this means a new beginning, a restored communion with God where we receive God's blessings with thankfulness and gladness results. What a huge miracle which only the Holy Spirit can accomplish!

• And this dear congregation, God counts as the right praise, receiving the gifts of God in truth and in the Spirit is true worship! Receiving what God gives in His way and in His place, on His terms! That is what pleases God, and that is what we so desperately need!

• May the Lord open your eyes of your hearts to realise this and you won't be able to keep this great miracle to yourself. Whoever realises this great wonderful revelation of God *will* share it with others!

• To God, the fountain of Righteousness, be glory, forever and ever! **Amen.**

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen. (^{ESV} Eph 3,20-21)