



Free EvangelicalLutheran  
Synod in South Africa

## Sermon for SundayExaudi 2017

*Jesus prays for His Church!*



St. John's Lutheran Parish  
Shelly Beach

### • The Word of God for this Sermon is written in John 17, 1-11:

- **ESV** <sup>1</sup> When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you,
- <sup>2</sup> since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.
- <sup>3</sup> And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.
- <sup>4</sup> I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.
- <sup>5</sup> And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.
- <sup>6</sup> "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.
- <sup>7</sup> Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you.
- <sup>8</sup> For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.
- <sup>9</sup> I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.
- <sup>10</sup> All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them.
- <sup>11</sup> And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

• *Let us pray: Come Holy Spirit, give us ears that bear the Word of Christ, which will lead us to pray for the true unity of the church based on the unity of the Trinity. Amen.*

### • **Dear Members of Christ's Body!**

- Between the Ascension Day of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost there was a waiting period assigned to the disciples. They were to wait in prayer for the power from on High in the "upper room", the same place where they had received the Lord's Supper.
- In our Gospel passage for today, we are reminded of the fact that, moments before Jesus crossed the Kidron stream in the Garden Gethsema to be captured

and eventually be led to the Cross, He had prayed for the unity of His Apostles. All were present, except the “son of destruction”, Judas. All were present, although they were all scattered in the Garden of Gethsema, although they all failed to believe the words Jesus had spoken to them regarding His Crucifixion and Resurrection.

- Jesus had prayed for them. That is why they were all united, in one accord, in the upper room, rejoicing in Jesus’ Resurrection, waiting in anticipation for the authority of God to come onto them. They were waiting for God’s authority and power to send them out to be the feet, mouths and arms of Christ. Christ would continue His Mission through them. Just like Christ was visibly authorised in His Baptism, so they would visibly be authorised to go in the Name of the Lord and proclaim the repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
- We notice, the prayer of Jesus was effective! What He prayed for happened. This is important to realise if we consider the next step: Jesus not only asked for the unity of the Apostles, but He also asked for the unity of all those who would believe in Him through the Word of the Apostles! He was also asking, praying, for the unity of the next generations. And now the huge question: Was His prayer effective also for those? The answer must be: yes. What Jesus prays for from His Father will be! So, what does this tell us? There must be an *existing unity* based on the Word of the Apostles!
- The difficulty for us is, where is this unity found? Christianity not only seems fractured, there are many real divisions. Do you see the dilemma: how does one reconcile the effective prayer of Jesus with the fact of all the different confessions?
- An answer to this question must lie in what Jesus tells us about the unity He prays for!
- First of all, Jesus very clearly states that He is not praying for the world! He is only praying for those whom the Father has given to Him, those who believe and keep the Word of the Apostles. Those are the ones who believe that the Father has sent Jesus, in truth. Those are the ones who are in Christ and Christ is in them. Those are the ones who have been baptised by water and the Spirit, who have been born from above, out of God. Those are the ones in whom Baptism created faith in Christ being the Lamb of God who takes away their sins!
- We have to notice, that the teaching of Jesus being the only Saviour, the only one, who has received the Word from God, the Word become flesh, is central to

distinguish between “in” or “out”. Paul echoes explicitly what Jesus says, that those who are in Christ should not be conform to the world! Those in Christ are still in the world, but they are not from the world. In other words, any syncretism, any acknowledgement of other gods or other saviours is definitely not part of the unity Christ prayed for!

- There is only One Truth. Only Christ is right! All others who pretend to be saviours are simply liars, they are masks of satan. Satan transforms himself and is behind all other gods, idols and consequently movements trying to unify all saviours, sangomas, gurus and idols and ideals which claim to be able to save the world or redeem it.
- Any church or whatever movement, irrespective of its name, that refuses to confess that only Jesus is the Truth, that only He is the true Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world, is not part of the unity Christ prays for! Let us not be deceived by the spirit of our times which more than ever before pushes hard to accomplish a unity of all religions. That unity is definitely excluded from the prayer of Jesus, according to His own Word.
- The unity Jesus prayed for, which is an existing unity, although it is hidden to a large extent, is founded by the Word of the Apostles, according to Christ’s clear intentions! This Word is central, because this Gospel creates the faith necessary.
- Jesus prayed for this very specific unity and Paul would then admonish us to maintain this unity. Paul defines this unity as consisting of One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism.
- We need to see clearly that this unity is *not* all inclusive. It strives to reach out to all people and the truth is proclaimed in love, to call all others to repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
- But, we have to realise, it is not the duty of the church to go out and form new unities with others not on the existing unity. It is not our mission to increase the foundational basis of the unity to in the end almost include everything of the world. That is not how mission works. That would be mission without the cross. In other words trying to make the foundation of the unity of the church conform with the world in our time, to make it appeal to all people! That is not the mission work Jesus prepared His disciples for.
- Jesus prayed for the real unity, flowing from the unity with His Father and the Holy Spirit. From the base of this unity the Repentance for the forgiveness of sin is proclaimed, is handed out in public and private. This mission outreach will

either be accepted or rejected. And it is especially when we face rejection after handing out the Truth that Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in Him that we are at risk to tamper with the content of the message, that we think, maybe we should not proclaim this message so exclusively. For this moment Jesus prayed, that we will not fall for that temptation but stick to the Truth of the exclusiveness Jesus being the Christ, because it is the Truth.

- It is part of the pattern, part of Jesus' Mission, the Cross, rejection and even in extreme cases isolation, which we might have to endure. If these times come over us, we may remember, Jesus has prayed also for us, that we will remain steadfast to the One foundation, One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism.

- On the other hand, this does not mean that we build our own monastery and have nothing to do with others. Jesus wants us to leave our holy mountain and genuinely in Love reach out to others, also to those who are deceived by the unity of absolute inclusivity. The first generations of Christians were scattered from Jerusalem for this purpose! Steadfastness in the unity of Christ makes us free to reach out to others with the best news, the purity of the Gospel, that we sinful people may become free of sin, that it is removed from us, that our guilty conscience is made as white as snow, because the One true Lamb of God is so effective of taking all our sins away! Really, who still wants to be stuck with his/her own evilness, how foolish is that? True freedom from sin, death and the devil is a genuine option in Christ!

- Therefore, we fall in with Jesus and pray for the true existing unity of the Church, that more and more people will find the Rock of our salvation, a steadfast and certain foundation, that even if we loose our grip, He firmly grips us and holds us to abide in the one true Church of God, Christ's Body, the One living temple of the LORD! **Amen.**

- *Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

***Amen.***