



Free Evangelical
Lutheran Synod
in South Africa

Sermon for New Year's Eve 2017
(RH4)
**The Lord has guided us and continues
to guide us!**



St. John's Lutheran Parish
Shelly Beach

• **The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Exodus 13, 20-22:**

- ^{ESV 20} And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness.
- ²¹ And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.
- ²² The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.
- ***Let us pray:*** *Come Holy Spirit, open our ears, enlighten our minds so that we will be comforted by the Word of God which guides us by day and by night. Amen.*

• **Dear Beloved of the Lord!**

• Another year has passed away. We sang about time flying past. Yes, time is moving. We also, we are on our way to the promised land. At this stage, we who are still in this world, are wandering through the “wilderness”. If we look back on what has been, we see on the one hand the Grace of God written large over the past year and on the other hand we see the things which we would rather forget, where we messed up, where things just went wrong. If we look to the things beyond our control, we might see many dangers and “Pharaoh” still continues to chase us. There might still be a some unfinished business which is haunting us as we look back.

• If we try and look forward, we are faced with uncertainties, which press themselves into our face immediately. We might even see huge obstacles like the Red Sea looming in front of us. How are we ever going to get across safely?

• So, we are pretty much in the same situation as the Israelites escaping from Egypt, but as they came into the wilderness the odds seemed even greater than

when they were suffering under the Pharaoh. Humanly speaking, we seem to be in a dreadful situation. We are not from the world, but we are still in the world. Behind us we have someone or things chasing after us. In front of us, we see obstacles and the calculated odds are just stacked high against us.

- This is where the OT Word opens our eyes for the full reality, which we not always are aware of, which we simply forget so often. The LORD went before the Israelites during the day and during the night. He never left them alone.

- The Israelites could observe this fact all the time. God was with them. However, as soon as Pharaoh and his forces were spotted marching after them, a great fear for the Egyptian force gripped them all and they started to resent that they had ever embarked on this journey into the wilderness. Wasn't it better in Egypt? At least there they were alive although they were slaves. You, see they wanted to go back to the good old days. Of course, they conveniently forgot how sore it was to get hit by an Egyptian leash, how they suffered under their harsh masters. No grace, only work, work, work.

- Don't we often have these same thoughts, about our personal life, about our vocation, about our family and about our congregation, synod and church? Doesn't this question of the Israelites finds some resonance in us? What are we doing in the wilderness, Lord? Why did we ever embark on this journey? Why did we ever leave the place or space where we were in? We knew we were slaves to our circumstances! Somehow we knew we had to depart someday. But it was also quite comfortable, we knew what to expect.

- Now, as we embarked on this journey of faith, there was excitement in the beginning, but now we feel so much more uncertain, because all we see is wilderness and obstacles in our way. Where *are* we going to? The Lord said, to the promised land, but that seems a long way off!

- Now, whatever the Israelites experienced on their way to the promised land was written down for us to be a fore-shadow of the things we in the NT would experience in our life in the church of Christ, in His Body. We are in God's Israel

and we are on the way to the promised eternal land, as we meander through the times and deceptions of this world.

- The greatest temptation was for the Israelites and still is for us, to think that what God has given us is not sufficient to keep us on His path!
- This is where the message of Christmas ties in very well: a son was given to us. His name is Immanuel: God with us. His name is Jesus: He will save them from their sins. The Epistle reading of tonight sums it up well [Rom 8,31]: *“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”*
- If God is for us ...! Nobody and no thing can throw us off course, can throw us off the Lord’s path to eternal Life! Neither those things of the past year or years, that haunt us, nor the things seeming insurmountable in front of us. We have God forgiving us our sins- this is not a mere slogan. This takes care of everything that has been, in God’s eyes. Now, we know the petition in the Lord’s Prayer, “forgive us our sins as we forgive those who trespass against us”- let’s do that by the power of the Holy Spirit whom we have received in Baptism and forgive those who sinned against us. Then God washes clean your past- He will not hold your past against you, you being the new Adam in Christ!
- This does not mean, that your old Adam comes free. No. He must be kept down. Therefore, his actions will have consequences depending on how serious his trespasses were. That is to keep him in the grave. The law enforcement must take its course against our old Adam. It is not helpful if law enforcement agencies pardon our old Adams. That will result in chaos. If you pardon one, you have to pardon all.
- The forgiveness of sins is handed out by Jesus through members of His Body, not by the law enforcement officers serving the left-hand reign of God, the state. What it means is, sin does not stand in the way of eternal life any-more, although we might still have to pay fines or lose our position at work or in severe cases even have to go to jail.
- If God washed clean your past He also leads you towards the way to eternal

Life. In other words, if He is for us, if He is our Saviour, we don't need anything more! Our journey is worth the while, although it may not always feel that way to us. Our journey is like an adventure with Jesus as our more than capable tour-guide who can handle and turn all situations into benefit for our new Adam.

• The journey through the wilderness is part of God's way of strengthening our faith, of giving witness to others, of stripping away dangerous idols. Uncertainty in terms of not seeing in the near future what is going to happen with us, with our congregation, synod, family and vocation is part of the exercise! Faith is hoping in something certain we cannot yet see. What we do know and have is, God is with us. Nothing happens to us which He doesn't allow and approve of.

• So, we thank the Lord tonight, for leading and saving us through the past year and we ask Him to give us faith to trust Him as we continue, with all other members of His Body, through the wilderness, on His way to the promised land.
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)