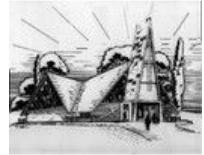




Free Evangelical
Lutheran Synod
in South Africa

Sermon for the Second Sunday of Advent (Proper B) 2017

The beginning of the Gospel!



St. John's Lutheran Parish
Shelly Beach

• **The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Mk 11, 1-10:**

- ¹ ESV Mark 11 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
- ² As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way,
- ³ the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."
- ⁴ John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
- ⁵ And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.
- ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey.
- ⁷ And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.
- ⁸ I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."
- ***Let us pray: Come Holy Spirit, open our ears, enlighten our minds and lead us to repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Amen.***

• **Dear Daughter of Zion!**

- Beginning of the Gospel- "good proclamation", of Jesus Christ, Son of God. That is how Mark starts his Gospel. He obviously wants to tell us something by beginning like this. And its not that, you know, here you are at the beginning not the end of the writing.
- But first we need to cover the fact that he calls his writing "Gospel" "Euangelion". Theologians have always puzzled what type of genre best fits this writing. Heroic biography, narrative account, teaching were some of the main suggestions through the ages.
- Some ancient church fathers held, that this writing was a completely new genre, namely "Gospel". It's completely unique, and the fact that it just doesn't want to fit in any one of the genres of the day, points strongly in this direction. Recently I have found several new commentaries affirming that indeed what we have in these Gospel writings is a unique genre all by itself. Its a biography of the person Jesus, and its a narrative of Jesus' ministry and its an account of the teachings of Jesus,

as taught in what He said and did, and all of these very closely tied to the unique person Jesus, who is the Christ, the Son of God. All of these together make out the “Gospel” genre. It truly makes sense to have a new special genre for the most unique person ever to be born into this world.

- The person of Jesus is so intimately and closely woven into the narrative, the story, and the teaching. You cannot rip these apart. Furthermore, this Jesus did not operate in isolation. He always had people around Him, whom He gave the Gospel, which includes the whole dynamic package as we will unpack.
- So, it makes sense too, why we have more than one or two Gospels, to unpack, to reveal the many perspectives of God’s real presence, born into the world.
- Let’s get back to the “beginning of the Gospel”. Directly after this very short, but nevertheless dynamic and dense heading, immediately we hear a quote from Isaiah 40:3, that God is sending His messenger that will prepare the way for Christ. John, the Baptist is the forerunner. And he is identified as a voice in the wilderness. That was his function- to be the voice preparing the way of Christ. John’s whole life had one purpose, to prepare the way of the Kyrios, the LORD! By the way, this is significant. Here already we see, Jesus is revealed as being Kyrios, LORD, what the Greek OT would use to translate the Hebrew YHWH.
- I am highlighting this, because there are so many false rumours floating around in society today, in the social media and elsewhere, that emperor Constantine has supposedly invented the Trinity and the two natures of Christ. It is utter nonsense. Within the first two verses of the Gospel of Mark, the divinity of Jesus is revealed.
- Let’s continue with John’s mission. How was he to do it?
- John the Baptist was remaining in the wilderness- that means he could not have been influenced by human beings- and there he proclaimed a baptism, a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He was preparing the Way of Christ, by being God’s instrument, by calling people to repentance, by calling them to be baptised, for the forgiveness of sins.
- Do, you see what God was doing through him? God was facilitating repentance of the nation Israēl. He was providing the opportunity to repent, to prepare for the coming One, who, John proclaimed, will be the stronger One! John was not worthy to untie the strap of Jesus’ sandals.
- The reason being, Jesus would baptise with the Holy Spirit! Whilst John’s baptism was in a way summarising forgiveness of sins as found in the OT times, now in Jesus something extraordinary and completely new would come, He would baptise with

the Holy Spirit!

• And we see, that ^[5]“*all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.*” The people followed the proclamation of John. They believed that he was a true prophet, sent by God. This is interesting, because the same would not happen with the proclamation of Jesus, especially later on! In fact, nobody of Jesus’ disciples would go to Galilee to meet Him after His death and burial, although He specifically had told them that He would meet them in Galilee [14,28] after His resurrection.

• So, John and his proclamation of a baptism for repentance is included in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That is, the whole of the OT is included and was a preparation which culminated, which reached its peak, in the mission of John the Baptist. So, there is a continuity between the OT times and OT Scriptures and the coming of Jesus as Christ.

• However, something very new came with Jesus. Both John the Baptist and Jesus called for repentance, John called to repent about the sins which resulted in the forgiveness of sins, Jesus called for a repentance, that would lead to faith. Jesus brought the reign of God to earth. He was baptised with the Holy Spirit. Wherever He was, the Holy Spirit was present.

• So, these two go together when we speak about “Gospel-writing” in the widest sense: repentance for forgiveness of sins and receiving the Holy Spirit, that creates or renews trust in Jesus, in us.

• And we have to see, God facilitates these gifts, He makes them available, formally, that is, He provides ordained people to hand out forgiveness of sins and faith in Christ, whilst guaranteeing His presence of Grace, wherever this is practiced.

• Jesus’ Words will never pass away [13,31], because they are spoken by a bodily resurrected, living Lord who uses ordained servants of His word to publicly speak to His people from person to person. But, not only through ordained ministers, He also speaks through other members of His body to us, in private.

• Therefore, to believe this, to accept this as God’s way of communicating with us, we need to repent of our own objections we have against this fact. We have to realise, if I am not fully convinced that here in God’s Divine Service we gather around the living Lord, speaking to us, through the voice of the servant of the word, here is the gate of heaven, here God visits us in reality, that this block is caused by our old mind, by the mind of our old Adam, who cannot cope with such a thought! It simply goes beyond his scope and borders of logic! We need to repent of this

block in our minds, this blindness of not seeing or believing that God is truly present amongst us!

• This is the main reason why many people are not going to services anymore, because they don't believe that God is present where His Word is voiced, is spoken. Many are looking for God in other phenomena, apart from the Word of God. They are chasing after sensibilities of their old Adam's religious experience. And when they finally come to realise that it is empty, they become agnostics.

• The only medicine against this old evil foe is, to come into the presence of the living God and to hear the words of Christ spoken into our ears. And through these spoken words, a miracle happens, working of the Holy Spirit, we begin to hear, we begin to see, sometimes slowly, we begin to grasp that this is not some old history lesson we are doing here, but that it is live!

• It doesn't help to think of these things only, its not a decision on my side, or an act of my will, rather, when I hear the Word of Christ proclaimed to me, it rings true in my heart, in the deepest core of my existence. Its a spiritual experience, if you want, hearing the Word of Christ, in the presence of His person, in the presence also of the Father and the Holy Spirit, does something with us.

• Preaching the Word of Christ has immensely practical manifestations for the person, who receives, hears the word, digests it, takes it in. It grows in you. It drives out your old narrow minded and blind mind. It opens up your mind for new horizons, which began with the OT times and came into fruition with the coming of Jesus into our world. The coming of this Word into our darkness has changed the history of the world forever, and by forgiving you your blindness and by giving you the Spirit of God, the holy Spirit, the reign of God is present here and now, for you, forever. Thanks be to God! Amen.

*The Lord Jesus Christ says: "Surely I am coming soon. Amen. Come. Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all of you." **Amen.***