



Free Evangelical
Lutheran Synod
in South Africa

Sermon- Sunday Septuagesimae (RH4) 2018

Idolatry versus Grace!



St. John's Lutheran Parish
Shelly Beach

• The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Jeremiah 9,23-24:

• **ESV** ²³ Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches,
• ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD."

• **Let us pray:** *Come Holy Spirit, open our ears, make us wise to know and understand the Lord, so that we will boast in knowing Him and giving all Glory to Him. Amen.*

• **Dear Beloved of the Lord!**

• For us Jeremiah is a well-known and highly respected prophet of God. It is quite difficult to imagine how unpopular Jeremiah was in his times. He was the one who had to bring mostly messages of destruction, messages of warning and final devastation to Israel and its kings.

• The LORD explained what was happening [9,12-14]: *"Who is the man so wise that he can understand this? To whom has the mouth of the LORD spoken, that he may declare it? Why is the land ruined and laid waste like a wilderness, so that no one passes through? And the LORD says: "Because they have forsaken my law that I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice or walked in accord with it, but have stubbornly followed their own hearts and have gone after the Baals, as their fathers taught them."*

• It is truly astonishing, how people, whom the LORD rescued out of Egypt, then later on made to settle in the promised land, how such people could turn and fall back onto Baal worship! How is that possible? What did Baal ever do for them?

• It is a strange thing that they had no problem worshipping Baal, a lifeless home-made idol, passed on by tradition. They had no problem always returning

to Baal worship. They needed no command to do so. They were naturally inclined to follow these idols! The masses of Israel and Judah followed Baal. Baal had more prophets than the LORD in Israel and Judah.

• The LORD draws an important connection: “...*they have forsaken my law that I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice or walked in accord with it, but have stubbornly followed their own hearts...*” and then He adds “*and have gone after the Baals*”. Here the crux of the matter is exposed. The Law of God was foreign to them in the sense that it did not originate from them, whilst following the Baals was following their *own* hearts! Thus, the Baals were nothing more, nothing less, than their *own* idols, whom their *own* hearts had created!

• The idols they had created in their own hearts were much easier to follow than the real living LORD who came to them from the outside as a foreigner, as a stranger, whom they didn't know, and above all, whom they couldn't control! The Baals were friendly to culture! The Baals had no problem with other gods next to them. They were open for other deities. The Baals changed with the times. They were always contemporary! They never complained. They gave them whatever *they* desired!

• However, in reality, that was living their own dream. That was like living a virtual reality, blind to the actual, and in that case, horrible truth. Jerusalem and the temple were going to be destroyed by the very nations they were whoring after. The LORD would do it through them!

• This takes us to the two verses for today, where God nails the core problem of sin on the head: “*Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, ...*”. Here the fallen heart is exposed! Here the poison is identified which messes with us keeping the first commandment.

• The LORD unmasks a law here, a phenomenon, if you want, which by the way unites us with the Israelites as well as the Judeans, with all people of all times—something which truly unites us with all people, namely, we like to boast about

our strengths, our ideas, our wisdom, our experiences, our good character traits. There is this strong underlying bent in us to focus on what we have created and achieved!

• And let's be honest, our society runs by it. You can almost not escape it. Children are taught on schools to do exactly that, to highlight and present all their best traits and strengths and hide the weak sides, when they go for a job interview for example. You have to market yourself. You have to sell yourself. How else are you going to get a place at work? But, notice, the language of enslavement!

• Now, what is the antidote against this? Would it help to not boast at all?

• That is not the case. Instead, the LORD gives us something real to boast about:

"... let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD." The LORD gives us something real to boast about, that we understand and know Him. Know what about Him? That He practices justice and righteousness in the earth. He practices steadfast Love! He gives us something to boast about which He delights in!

• But here lies a deep seated issue our old Adam has with the LORD's gifts to us. You see, if you receive a gift, the person giving the gift controls what you will receive and the way in which you will receive it!

• A self-oriented being has an issue with "givens" of life. It wants to minimise those. It rebels against those. The whole strife of our old Adam is to be autonomous, is to be able to have choices. If something is simply given to us it means we cannot choose and this makes us dependant rather than free. That is what our wisdom and experience tell us. Deep down, our old Adam says to God, why are you giving me something *You* like? Why are You not giving me something *I* like? That is what the Baals do, my idols.

- However, who practices steadfast love, justice and righteousness in the world? Who does this in full pureness? That is what everyone wants and ultimately needs. Who practices this? We know the devastating answer from the Psalms and quoted in Romans 3, there is no human being who does this. Not one.
- Except the LORD our God! We know, being in Christ, Him practising righteousness, justice and steadfast love benefits us! Yes, we have to receive what He gives in the way He gives it to us!
- What does this make with us? Gifted children of God! Anyone who receives the means of Grace, cannot say, 'I have received nothing today!' You leave as renewed gifted children of God! Even if the pastor's sermon is poor on that Sunday, you still receive, forgiveness of sins, you hear Scripture being read, you receive the Lord's Supper where Jesus gives Himself and you receive the blessing of God. Yes, this practice of God, His Liturgy, makes you totally dependent on God. However, this dependency is the best freedom ever! Yes, you forfeited your choice in these spiritual matters, but you couldn't and wouldn't have made a better choice. You have come to know the living LORD, the truly, steadfastly, loving God, not some fake lifeless self-help idol!
- This has very practical repercussions for us. There is a major shift in confidence happening here: A shift from trying to induce a shaky and fake confidence in yourself through the things you have created, to a confidence coming completely from the outside of yourself, as a gift. Determined not by your own steadfastness, but by the steadfastness of the Rock of our Salvation. He is your mighty fortress, your confidence and new identity creator! In Him you have *all the confidence* you need. He wants you here, on earth, with the gifts you have received to use them for the benefit of your neighbour and for the praise of His name. To God be the glory! **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).