

Sermon 1 Corinthians 2:1-12 5th Sunday after Epiphany Series A

Sermon: 5th Sunday after Epiphany Series A

Text: 1 Corinthians 2:1-12 (v.12)

Theme: Welcoming all people (4th FELSISA Value)

Goal: Having been accepted by God's grace, we accept and welcome all in God's fellowship

Dear Friends,

Introduction: The fourth of the Core Values offset by our Synod, WELCOMING ALL PEOPLE, has as background the history of this country, and as goal to accomplish God's eternal will to save all.

We all know and some had experienced the time of segregation in this country. People were separated in groups according to the colour of their skin. Even the churches, with some exceptions, used to follow this rule: a church for the white, a church for the black, a church for the coloured, a church for the Indians, and so on.

I read once that Mahatma Gandhi, the great Indian leader, while visiting South Africa, went to a Christian church on Sunday morning. But he couldn't stay at the service and was invited to go out because his skin was different from those worshipping in that church. – Maybe this was the only opportunity he would have to hear the Gospel of Jesus; but he was not allowed to.

Christ is for all and the church is for all people!

I – The spirit of the world versus the Spirit who is from God
Paul makes a contrast between "the spirit of this world" and "the Spirit who is from God". The spirit of this world doesn't recognize the sovereignty of God, or misunderstands the will of God. It doesn't follow the true Wisdom of God and "doesn't accept the things that come from the Spirit of God" (v.14). Therefore so many laws and

practices among people oppress the fellows and despise others made in the same image of God as everyone. The FELSISA booklet says: *We believe that God is the creator of all people and that all people are valuable to him and loved by him equally.* Two Bible verses are quoted, Galatians 3:26, 28: “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus... There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ.” And Philippians 2:3-4: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourself. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interest of others.”

“We have received the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.” When we understand the free grace we have received by faith in Jesus, acknowledging that we don’t deserve it, but it is a gift from God, we will never more despise others because they are different from us. God wants to save all and His grace is free for all as well!

II – Christ died for all

The sacrifice of Christ on the cross was not exclusively for certain people. The Kingdom of God doesn’t belong to one race, as the Jews thought so. This was the constant struggle of the Apostle Paul when he was preaching Christ and establishing Christian churches among the gentiles. Even some Christian Jews opposed Paul. But, by God’s grace, the Spirit who comes from God convinced those opponents that Christ has died for all and that people from other backgrounds were members of God’s Kingdom by faith in Jesus too.

Our booklet says: *We believe that Christ died on the cross for all people and that every believer forms part of the “one body” of Christ;* and quotes Ephesians 2:19: “You are no longer foreigners or aliens,

but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household."

As God loves the world, He commands us as well to love all. To love means, in our context, to accept all in our fellowship and to help those in need. The Psalm ⁽¹¹²⁾ and the Old Testament ^{reading (Isaiah 58:1-9)} highlight how we are "salt of the earth" and "light of the world" according to the Gospel reading: we have to "to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke... to share out food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter". One of our visitors some time ago was very impressed when he saw Luther's Loot box full of food and other stuff. He said to me when I visited him: *This shows that your church loves the poor.* It was a good testimony.

III – Christ sent His disciples to make disciples of all nations
When Jesus accomplished all He had to do in this world and was ready to go back to the Father after His resurrection, He sent His disciples: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation... (Mark 16:15); and, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...and teaching them..." (Matthew 28:19). No one is excluded from God's salvation plan. Peter wrote, "He (the Lord) is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

The Core Values booklet says: *This motivates us to be inclusive and to welcome all people joyfully into our fellowship, irrespective of their social class, cultural and ethnic background.*

United in Christ and in love for one another we also seek to create the necessary freedom for cultural expression without judgement or domination, each regarding the other more important than himself.

Conclusion: In practice, this issue is not that simple as it appears. We all have our personal background and experiences which some times block us in this matter. Therefore we have to talk about it openly and

submit ourselves to the Spirit who comes from God, so that we should not hinder God's good will to save all, but be partners in God's mission. We have good and bad stories of people being welcome at St. Thomas, more good than bad. Many of you (as myself and my family) came to St. Thomas when the church was still organized and each of us can tell how well we were received and welcomed here. If you had a good experience, do the same with new visitors. If your experience was not that good, try to do it better to welcome new people. God is gathering His people around His altar and we have to embrace them and firm them. We cannot throw away anyone that doesn't match with my opinion. Each of us is a person by him/herself. But we are all loved by the same God, we believe in the same Jesus Christ, and we received the same Holy Spirit, being part of one big Christian family. "Actions speak louder than words". Be kind with all, enjoy our fellowship, meet your friends, but don't forget to look after the visitors and to welcome them. Christ is for all!

I grew up in a very traditional German congregation. When I graduated as pastor, I was sent to plant a new church in a township of the big city of São Paulo. It was a challenge to live with people from a wide range of backgrounds, religions, colours, races, most of them poor, with lots of children in the streets. But the Gospel of God is powerful and after one and a half year visiting, preaching, teaching, we had enough people to found a congregation, Peace Lutheran Church. The first elected Elders were: The chair, a Japanese born in Brazil; the Secretary, an African Brazilian; the Treasurer, a German Brazilian. I always thank God for that good opportunity to experience His grace reaching so many different people. – And the four years in Kenya was another excellent experience to understand what the holy Christian Church really means: I counted people from 42 different countries coming to our church as members or as visitors; from countries as far as Alaska and Australia, Island and South Africa.

Christ is for all and we welcome all to our fellowship. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 09 February 2014