

SERMON SYNOD 2017

Let us be quiet in front of the Lord and ask him to open our hearts and minds for us to hear his will! Amen

Peace be with you and mercy through our Lord Jesus Christ ! AMEN

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“FEAR NOT ...I HAVE CALLED YOU BY NAME”

On Google you can find the “Ultimate list of more than a hundred forms of Phobias and Fears!!” Listed alphabetically there is Acrophobia , the fear of heights, Aviophobia, the fear of flying and Claustrophobia, the fear of enclosed or tight spaces to mention just a few. Then of course there is something like Glossophobia, the fear I am suffering of the most at the moment, namely the fear of speaking in front of an audience!

Fear not, I have called you...you are mine! This is the theme of our synod this year! A very significant synod, at the start of a new 6 year synod cycle during the year of the 500 year celebrations of Reformation! What an incredible statement during our specific time in our country’s history and in the relevance of our church!

Let us have a closer look at the verse in the book of the prophet Isaiah from which the theme has been taken: Isaiah 43 v 1 according to the New International Version (NIV)

But now, this is what the Lord says-

He who created you, Jacob,

He who formed you, Israel:

“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

1. It is the **Lord**, the God of Jacob who speaks these words through his Prophet.

The God who created the whole universe and who created us! Who has formed each one of us! I love the Zulu word for this part of our verse: it says “owakubumba”! God has formed you like a potter would form a clay pot! I have fond childhood memories of my father making clay oxen with clay we went to collect from a special spot on our farm! Each ox would have different shaped horns or a different size of hump. In the end we would paint them in different colours like our Nguni cattle and then they would get names: Mpofu, the one with the colour of the Eland or Msomi, the one with a red flank, like the Red winged starling or “Volosi” the vooros who would always be in the front line!

This is the picture I have in front of me today! We are all here representing our different congregations from the north to the south from the east to the west! We are here in different shapes and sizes, in different colours and we have different names! We all have been created, formed” bumbad” individually with a purpose by the one God, the God who has called us and who has redeemed us!

2. I have redeemed you says the Lord! Through his Son he has redeemed us and we are all the same! We are his children He says it so clearly: You are mine. This verse is often used as a word for Baptismal Services. DO WE REALIZE THE POWER OF THIS WORD FOR US TODAY! As we are gathered here at the beginning of a new 6 year cycle of synod! We are not here, just because a congregation has elected us as a synod representative! No we are here today, because we have been called! To me it is so important that we realise the significance of this calling! Just as Jesus called his disciples from different walks of life, a doctor, a tax collector, fishermen, simple men, none of them having any theological training; so we are here today, called for a purpose! We are here for a very specific purpose at this moment in time, this particular time of fear and uncertainty in our country, in our church and in our congregations.

3. There are congregations facing the real prospect of closing in the near future! Dwindling membership and lack of finances are a real challenge! Our church has a severe shortage of pastors which is about to get worse in the next ten years, as I look at all our bald and grey headed pastors!!! We all have our fear about the future of our country, a real fear! For the farmers amongst us there is the fear of natural disasters like fire, drought and floods! Never before in the short history of our new South Africa and the history of our ELCSA N-T church have many young people been so disillusioned and uncertain about their own future! And then for us adults it's another Phobia, metathesiophobia, the fear of change, which is probably the most common fear amongst us all. But the Lord who has redeemed us, who has made us his own, says to us today: Fear not You are mine! We all have been baptized in his Holy Name and have been taken up in his family through GRACE and the precious blood of HIS son!

4. There certainly is good enough reason to be fearful! The Israelites had enough reason to fear! It definitely was not a jolly "Spring Day Walk" from Babylon back to Jerusalem! There were Deserts and rivers to be crossed! The city had been ruined and the Temple flattened, destroyed! Fear Not ...says the Lord God, who brought the Children of Israel, home, back to Jerusalem after 70 years of exile/captivity in Babylon, the God who gave us a peaceful transition into a democratic dispensation in 1994, the same God has called us here today with a purpose! A real purpose, because we are his children and he still sees a future for us and he has a reason for calling us together today!

5. Through my involvement in mission and diaconal work I have been privileged to be part of a greater network of likeminded people working together in various projects. Reaching out to people experiencing real fears like hunger, disease, poverty, neglect and absolute hopelessness, it has become clear to me that no one can change the world on his own! Presently there is a movement taking place all over the world, but in

particular in Africa. With God on our side and working together with others, we can. Small steps, baby steps at a time. This God has called us to become part of something new, of this new movement! Just as the Reformation was the start of something new within the Church we are here today to listen and reflect. This something NEW is far greater than electing a few office bearers, amending some Church Laws and passing a budget of a couple of R Million! I believe that we are gathered here today for a **purpose** and I know that the following days of Synod will reveal to us what this purpose is!

6. Dear Brothers and Sisters! As we are about to start the proceedings of this Synod, let us be open-minded and willing to hear and experience the working of THE HOLY GOD through the SPIRIT of the HOLY GHOST and through the GRACE of our REDEEMER JESUS CHRIST! Let us trust God and hold on tight to the words of encouragement: Fear not... I have called you ...you are mine! AMEN

Our Heavenly Father,

we thank you for your calling today! Fill us with your SPIRIT and guide us through our deliberations and discussions so that our church can remain relevant in our times and fulfil its purpose! May your peace which surpasses all understanding be with us and keep our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN