



Growing Together in Christ

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

SOUTH-EASTERN DIOCESE

2016 DIOCESAN RALLY

BHEKUZULU HALL - UNIZULU



Hymn: 187 “Ngesaba umthetho kaNkulunkulu”

What is Rally in General?

- To (cause to) come together in order to provide support or make a shared effort:

What is the ELCSA’s constitutional understanding of the Rally?

- For the edification of the Saints
- Time of reflection and review
- Strengthening unity of the Church, that’s Diocese in our case –
- introducing new liturgical developments
- Fundraising event

Gospel Text: John 8:31 – 36

Jesus is the Truth; He will set you free! The Truth shall make you free!

The Gospel according to John presents Jesus as the eternal Word of God, who “became a human being and lived among us.” As the book itself says, this Gospel was written so that its readers might believe that Jesus is the promised Saviour, the Son of God, and that through their faith in him they may have life - John 20:31.

John emphasizes the gift of eternal life through Christ, a gift which begins now and which comes to those who respond to Jesus as the way, the Truth, and the life.

Verse 30: “Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him.” Now it is obvious that some of those many who put their faith in him were Jews, that’s why in verse 31 it says: “To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, ‘If you hold to the teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know Me, and I will set you free.’”

In this Gospel, "truth" does not refer to a philosophical ideal or the opposite of falsehood; it is knowledge of God as revealed in Jesus' own self. Knowing this "truth" is knowing God,

God made present in Jesus, who is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (14:6). Jesus makes this clear in 8:36, when he substitutes "the Son" for "the truth," saying that the Son makes people free. "As "Son" and "truth," Jesus himself is the very revelation of God (1:18; 5:19-27; 14:8-10).

Jesus does not expect his hearers to grasp the fullness of his claim all at once or to assess its validity through logic or research. They will come to know him as "the truth" if they live with him and remain connected to him and his word. Experience, not deduction, is the key.

Jesus' first comment, in 8:31-32, oozes with promise. Three things follow from the initial "if," which he speaks to people who had already expressed belief in him: If you continue in my word, [then]:

- you are truly my disciples
- you will know the Truth/You will know me and
- the truth will make you free/I will make you free

John says that remaining connected to or "dwelling in" him and his message is the true measure of discipleship. It is the path to truth and freedom.

While Reformation Day, by definition, includes an element of looking into history, back to Luther's deed of 1517 and all the streams that converged to bring about the Protestant Reformations, I would like us to focus more on our present/current and future needs and challenges that require us to consider renewal and reformation in our Church and society. Protesting is not a sin when the Truth is crucified upon the cross. Our forefathers were part of protestant reformation. A protest is an expression of bearing witness on behalf of an express cause by words or actions with regard to particular events, policies or situations, especially when the Truth is in ICU. In such a protest Matthew writes: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matt. 10:28). Jesus was expressing a protest here, read the same Chapter 8:40: "...but now you seek to kill me, a man who told you the truth ..."

The heart of today's text says Jesus is the Truth and He shall make us free!

As we look at the Truth that frees us from bondage let us learn from our own church history; reformation and one world as well as the prophetic voice that the church can't stand the test of times without it.

Reformation and One World.

Reformation was not a local event, it had a global dimension that stressed the centrality of Christ touching evening those at the periphery. Reformation was not only spiritual or religious but revolutionize almost all spheres of life, socially, politically, economically, educationally, etc.

Dr. Peter Hammond says that the sacrifices made by the Reformers, and the far-reaching impact of their courageous application on the Word of God to every area of life, needs to be rediscovered. The Christian Church has made more positive changes on earth than any other force or movement in history.

But I agree with one who says even if the world seems closer to us than ever before, poverty, discrimination and destitution are still part of the daily lives of countless people on this planet earth. And so, almost 500 years after Luther is said to have nailed his theses to the church door, the same ethos remains: to raise awareness, enlighten and protest.

Prophetic Voice

In current times, a “**Prophetic Voice**” generally refers to truth-telling. Often, people who are speaking with a “prophetic voice” are saying things that some people don't want to hear. Predicting future events is only a small part of prophecy as it appears in the Bible. In fact, many of the prophets didn't do it at all. I can't think of one (maybe Daniel, I am not sure) who didn't call people to repentance or action, though.

It is understanding the Truth in the Scriptures as they apply to history. Christians are called to perform a “prophetic” role in our modern-day culture. What does that mean? In both the Old and New Testaments, prophets were charged by God to deliver important messages to their contemporaries. They served as God's conscience to those they were sent to.

We have been called to speak and live out the truths of God – right where we live and work. We cannot sit by idly and watch the church and nation roll over a cliff. We must courageously cry out a warning and model the Lord's priorities. Prophets function in the context of the church. They are members of the church who see things in black and white. They ask the tough questions and challenge church members with besetting sins;

“And you shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free.” This popular statement is often used in a political context, referring to freedom from political oppression; extolling the value of the free press, and freedom of expression. While such are notable virtues, Jesus had something else in mind – freedom from something more serious than political oppression, **freedom from guilt and power of sin; Truth that comes from only one source, The Truth.**

Before concluding this sermon, I would like to call upon all of you to rally on a few challenges we face in both our church and society right now. These challenges don't just need prayer only but also courageous and truthful action

Collective/communal sinning

In our times, not many people sin as individuals but as groups. It's very difficult to deal with sins committed by groups or gangs. Charging a group is not only difficult but also time consuming. “We are the descendants of Abraham.” A group responded to Jesus. When criminals and sinners work together they are more dangerous than one sinner. **But time shall come when each person will face the judge alone!**

Fees must fall campaign

The Church should identify herself with students fighting for fees to fall because they represent the cries of the poor and disadvantaged people. **But violence, property destruction and injuring others is against what the church stands for. At the same time, political leadership and political parties should stop making empty promises in order to be voted for; clearly knowing these promises can't be met!**

Albinism

Killing a person living with albinism is an attack to God Himself. Earth is for all people to live on it. The right to live is a human right and killing persons living with albinism is depriving them their right to life. Church to be vocal in defense of persons living with albinism. **Religion and poor economic conditions are to be blamed for these killings.**

Corruption in our Media

It is indeed a shame now to listen to news or read newspapers, they seem to be too bias, dictating and imposing to us what we never said. Very few if any not sharing their

individual editors' opinions. The blood of many will be required from the media that assassinated, isolated them and sentenced them to be hanged. **We need the truth, not just an editor's opinion which is bias and protecting those he/she favours!**

R40 million

I would be failing as the Diocesan leader if I don't warn you about the scandal of R40 million. We who seat in ELCSA Church Councils on all levels we have a responsibility to come back and report what transpired in these councils. In GA, which is ELCSA General Assembly and in C.C, which is ELCSA Church Council there was no resolution that was taken to authorize or mandate anyone to go withdraw the **R40 million** from Old Mutual to an unknown investor. If there is anyone saying, there is such a resolution taken before the withdrawal never came forward. Those who withdrew the R40 million showed us a memorandum where they were promised that investing the R40 million with those they negotiated with would give back four billion in four weeks' time.

Can you as SED fold arms and say it's none of your business? It is your business as SED because as a Diocese we are expected to pay R100 000-00 to ELCSA Head Office; and more than R250 000-00 has already been taken from One Million Rand Drive to pay for our students stranded and suffering in the wilderness because of the disappearance of this R40million. Every time we go to church council meetings and GA the Diocese pays for travelling, accommodation and meals; etc. Don't fool yourselves that the issue of R40million is none of your business, you are now paying it back yourselves. I therefore call upon all SED members to leave no stone unturned till this R40 million is back **in full not in instalments!**

Pray for the Diocesan Council and the Diocesan Committees

If God leaves (if He has not yet left) the Diocesan Council and its Committees corruption will be the order of the day. Where there is no truth its normal to fight, quarrel and gossip. I wonder if the Third Person of the Trinity still attends our Council and Committee meetings! I say this because some of the resolutions taken from there clearly show that God was in a nap. Whoever has a sound mind and seats in our DC and Synod meetings can confirm that it is shameful; we need prayer. If it was possible we would meet in your presence so that you can see what kind of us, you elected to serve God's church. Jesus was facing the same situation with the Jews and Martin Luther in Rome, a hostile situation.

Jesus said to them, **“I am telling you the truth: everyone who sins is a slave of sin. A slave does not belong to a family permanently, but a son belongs there forever. If the Son sets you free, then you will be really free. I know you are Abraham’s descendants. Yet you are trying to kill me...”**

Jesus is the Truth and the Truth shall set us free!